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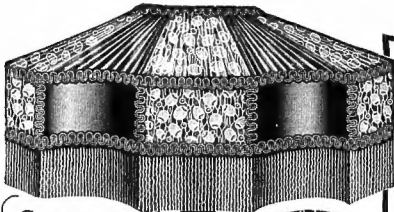

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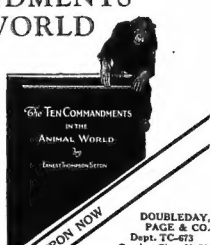

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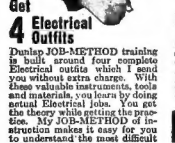

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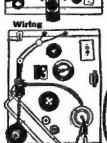

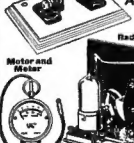

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The Frontier

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for

APRIL

2 NOVELS

The LAST DOMINO

A stirring drama of the wild Oklahoma lands of the Chickasaws

BY

J. E. GRINSTEAD

RED KNIVES

The stormy Northwest Territory in the days of the Revolution

BY

ERNEST HAYCOX

And among the other contributors

CLEM YORE—with a Western short story

JAMES B. HENDRYX—with an editorial

ANTHONY M. RUD—with a Western short story

WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE—with an article

J. D. NEWSOM—with a Moroccan novelette

JOHN BRIGGS—with a Borneo novelette

Ready For You on March 20th

The Ballad of Bill Morningstar

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

I LEFT my liquor on the bar, I left my mates all standing there,
Wi' hand to glass and empty grin; behind me swung the kennel door.
"Bill Morningstar! Bill Morningstar!" came singing down the freshening air,
Ye tarry overlong wi' sin! Come down to shore! Come down to shore!"

"Bill Morningstar!" I heard the call and knew the voice that called to me;
The harbor mist was burning gray wi' half a moon a-staggering through
And trembling on the long sea-wall—far out and faint across the sea,
Like bells that ring in Monterey, in evening when the hills are blue.

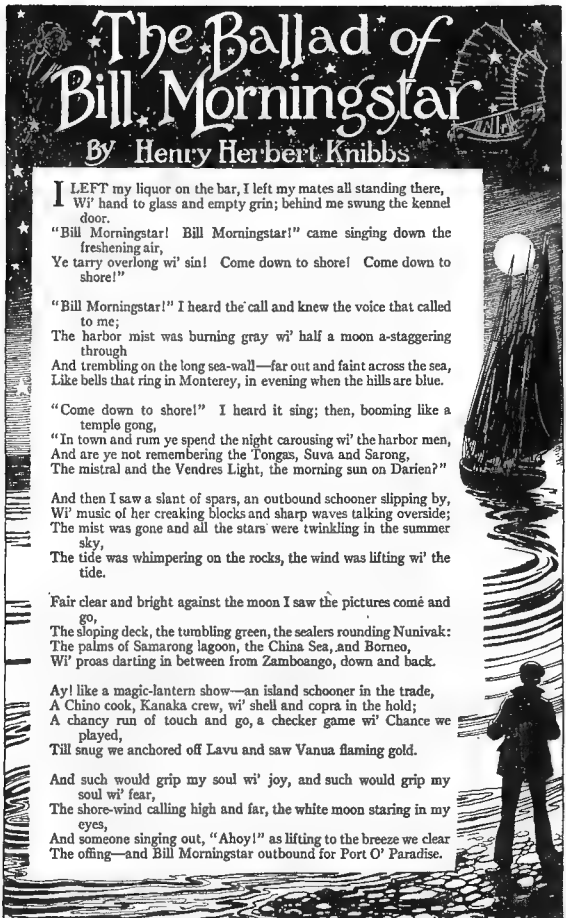
"Come down to shore!" I heard it sing; then, booming like a temple gong,
"In town and rum ye spend the night carousing wi' the harbor men,
And are ye not remembering the Tongas, Suva and Sarong,
The mistral and the Vendres Light, the morning sun on Darien?"

And then I saw a slant of spars, an outbound schooner slipping by,
Wi' music of her creaking blocks and sharp waves talking overside;
The mist was gone and all the stars were twinkling in the summer sky,
The tide was whimpering on the rocks, the wind was lifting wi' the tide.

Fair clear and bright against the moon I saw the pictures come and go,
The sloping deck, the tumbling green, the sealers rounding Nunivak:
The palms of Samarong lagoon, the China Sea, and Borneo,
Wi' proas darting in between from Zamboango, down and back.

Ay! like a magic-lantern show—an island schooner in the trade,
A Chino cook, Kanaka crew, wi' shell and copra in the hold;
A chancy run of touch and go, a checker game wi' Chance we played,
Till snug we anchored off Lavu and saw Vanua flaming gold.

And such would grip my soul wi' joy, and such would grip my soul wi' fear,
The shore-wind calling high and far, the white moon staring in my eyes,
And someone singing out, "Ahoy!" as lifting to the breeze we clear
The offing—and Bill Morningstar outbound for Port O' Paradise.



TRADER'S LUCK

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

When he took up the cause of Kit Carson's five-year-old daughter, Harvey Weaver brought upon himself the hatred of one of the Santa Fe Trail's most powerful traders, as well as the undying gratitude of her father. A tale of the Santa Fe Trail in its prime, when every mile was one of hardship and danger

THE merchant shook his head.

"I am sorry, sir," he said not unkindly, "but business is business. You are a stranger to me. Your note, unendorsed, means nothing."

Harvey Weaver nodded disconsolate assent.

"I can't deny that's fair, Mr. St. Vrain," he answered. "But I thought six hundred dollars would be ample to start with, and I——"

"It would start you as a trapper," interrupted St. Vrain. "But, as I have said, it costs at least twelve hundred dollars to freight a wagonload, and on top of that are your expenses for wagon, oxen or mules, and supplies. No, my friend, you can't launch a trading venture on a capital of six hundred dollars. Better try your hand at trapping—or, better still, find a job here in St. Louis."

"Thanks very much," returned Weaver firmly, "but I've spent two years at clerking, and all I have to show for it is the six hundred dollars you say isn't enough to buy me one wagonload of goods for Santa Fe. No, sir, I'm going on West or bust. And as for trapping, I don't know anything about it; and folks say the fur market is dropping from year to year."

"That's true enough," agreed St. Vrain. "Since the hatters took to using silk instead of beaver, it ain't been especially rich pickings for the mountain men. Got to admit it, Mr. Weaver. Well, sir, that's about all I can say to you. Be advised, and look for a likely chance along the river. You're a bright young feller, and somebody'll be able to work you to your own advantage."

There was a dogged light of resolution in Weaver's eyes as he rose reluctantly and donned his hat.

"I don't know how I'm going to do it," he said, "but I'll get West somehow—and the Santa Fe Trail looks mighty good to me."

St. Vrain shrugged his shoulders with the Gallic grace that was inherent in his blood.

"I like your grit," he owned, "but don't you make any mistake. Most greenhorns have grit—and a greenhorn is the cheapest article on the frontier. Good day, and I'm obliged to you for dropping in."

Weaver wandered out of the establishment, half-disposed to envy the clerks who were telling over bales of pelts or figuring lists of stores for bearded mountain men and plains riders or selling merchandise to

smaller storekeepers from the lesser communities beyond the Mississippi.

He had quitted his father's store in New York, with the laboriously-acquired savings of two years, high in heart and confident of the future's promise, making no doubt that he would be able at once to take his place in the growing trade of the prairies which ambitious youths in the East were regarding with hungry eyes, partly because of the profits reputed to be earned in it and partly because the circumstances under which it was conducted promised a rich harvest of adventure. But all his budding hopes had been blasted during his brief sojourn in St. Louis, for it seemed that the prairie and mountain trade shared one peculiarity with the humdrum processes of business back home: capital was a prime necessity.

And capital, adequate capital, Weaver lacked. His father had been inclined to resentment the moment he broached his idea of launching out for himself in the West.

"Isn't New York good enough for you, Harv?"

"It's good enough, but where is it going to get me?" Harvey had replied. "Little shops like ours are finding the going harder from year to year. Why, I could go uptown to Hearn's or Brooks Brothers and get better wages tomorrow than you pay me."

"Do it, then!" snarled his father.

"That isn't what I want. I want——"

"You want to live easy and lazy, that's all."

"No, sir, I want to be my own boss."

"Well, some day you will be," said his father, softening momentarily. "I can't live forever, Harv——"

"Yes, but how are we going to make this business big enough for two?"

His father had turned away to wait upon a stray customer. When the older man returned his face was set stubbornly.

"You spoke about makin' the business big enough for two," he said harshly. "Well, it is big enough for two. You get a livin', don't you?"

"That's all."

"There's many likely boys in town would be glad of it."

Harvey put down the quill with which he had been adding the meager columns in the ledger.

"Father, I'm going to St. Louis next week—as soon as you can hire somebody to take my place."

"Oh, you are, eh? Well, how are you aimin' to go, Harv? Been and robbed a bank, eh?"

"I've saved seven hundred dollars."

"Have, eh? Well, you won't get another cent from me. Goin' off flighty thisaway, and leavin' me in my age to run the whole shootin'-match! That's gratefulness, that is! Go on, boy—and when you're starvin' or shot full of Injun arrows, remember what I said."

Their relations had become slightly more amicable before they finally parted, Harvey reflected with dubious satisfaction, but his father had never relented from that first determination to do nothing to speed his son's venture. When every cent available had been drained into his purse, Harvey had found himself launched in life with an initial capital of very little more than that seven hundred dollars, of which he had boasted. As he stood on the board sidewalk in front of Bent, St. Vrain & Co.'s establishment he had six hundred sixty-five dollars left. True, he could live for some months on this. He might, as St. Vrain suggested, readily outfit himself as a trapper and hunter; but he was sensible enough to know that the life of such men, nomadic and restless, certainly did not as a rule lead to fortune, and in his own case was even less likely to, since he was entirely ignorant of the life of the frontier.

Also, that was not his ambition. And the greatest strength that Harvey Weaver possessed, if he had but realized, was just this unswerving attachment to any goal he set for attainment. Two years before he had made up his mind to save money from his slender salary, and nobody would ever know the self-denial this resolution had enforced upon one who was young, pleasure-loving and hot-blooded, and consigned by fate to dwell in a great city, thronged with opportunities for diversion and dissipation.

Compelled to seek his recreation without expense, he had taken it out in long walks in the farm country beyond Greenwich Village, and in runs to fires with his hose company. It had been a hard life, and a rigorous; but an impartial observer would have noted the obvious rewards to be expected from it: a disciplined will and a muscular body. They were assets for any man who sought fortune on the frontier, preferable at every turn to mere financial independence. But Weaver would have been disposed to laugh at anyone who told him this in his present gloomy mood.

HE STOOD there on the sidewalk, preoccupied and aloof, his eyes fixed on the strange crowd that flooded back and forth along the river-bank, where the great steamers whistled and clanked and the roustabouts sang and shouted as they shifted cargo, and wrestled with the woodpiles. A down-river boat, from New Orleans, most likely, was disgorging a stream of passengers as Weaver emerged from Bent, St. Vrain & Co.

Next to it a stern-wheeler was casting off to begin the long voyage up the devious channel of the Missouri. A bristle of feathers on her texas told of a party of Dakota chiefs, home-bound after a council with the Indian Agent; the white men who lounged on the low railing were almost as wild and savage in appearance, buckskin-clad, fur caps crowning their unkempt locks, long rifles beside them, fierce eyes bloodshot from the last liquor bout in the riverfront dives from which they had been driven, probably, by main force at the command of the American Fur Company—in frontier parlance, "The Company"—for whom they worked and to whom they belonged, body and soul, thanks to their intemperance.

From the stern-wheeler Weaver shifted his gaze to the throngs on the sidewalk. There was plenty to look at. Indeed, he never tired of wandering the streets of this outermost citadel of civilization, this farthest of urban communities. Mountain men, with scalp-locks hanging to their unwashed, sun-baked necks and medicine-bags dangling on their chests, Hawkins rifles in the hollows of their arms, strolled singly and in groups.

Lithe Frenchmen of the Mississippi communities and the delta; jaunty Canadian *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois;* gamblers in tall hats and frock-coats, a touch of snow-white linen at wrist and throat relieving the black of their cotumes; dark Mexicans from Santa Fe, their Indian blood shown in their lank hair; merchants, impeccable in broadcloth; women, dressed daintily in the last word of fashion; other women, lean, hollow-cheeked creatures in linsey-woolsey or calico, in from the settlements out Independence way for supplies or the satisfaction of viewing the teeming life of what to them was the mightiest metropolis in the world—all these and a dozen more diverse segments of humanity swarmed past Weaver's vantage point.

He started to turn to the right to seek his hotel, when he heard a sudden clamor of voices close at hand in the opposite direction, a child's shrill wail, iterated and reiterated, a man's expostulation, other men's voices raised in rough laughter—and again the child's plaint, intermingled with sobbing.

Weaver swung around on his heel and hastened toward the sound. Why he did so he could not have explained; it was instinctive. He saw at once a group of the wild-looking mountain men and hunters standing at the entrance of a small clothing store midway of the block. "Ladies and children's furnishings" the sign over the door read; his tradesman's eye marked it automatically. In the midst of the group he caught a glimpse of a small figure that struggled against a detaining hand. A bare-headed man in faded broadcloth, evidently the shopkeeper, was expostulating and comforting, all in the same breath.

"There, now, do be still; he's coming back. If you please, sir, don't plague her. Yes, yes, I said he was coming back. Didn't you hear him, yourself?"

Another voice beat his down, swaggering vocally: "Go on about your business, you. The kid comes from our country. She's part Injun. Anybody can see it. We'll look after her."

"It's Carson's brat," called a trapper.

"Shore is," came from a second man.

"All the better," exclaimed the man of the swaggering voice. "We'll show her a good time, eh?"

And as Weaver finally penetrated to his side he snatched hold of the child's wrist and dragged her from the shopkeeper, who seemed undecided what course to take.

"He said he was coming right back, but if you are his friends——"

"Friends!" laughed the man who had hold of the child. "Of course, we are. Mountain men, same as Kit, and we're from Santa Fe, too. We'll show missy here a good time. I don't doubt she's had a taste of mescal before this."

His cronies all chuckled and babbled approvingly. Every man of them, Weaver perceived, was drunk. And the child, a tiny little thing, only four or five years old, broke into another plaintive wail, with a patter of words in Spanish and some other tongue that Weaver guessed to be Indian. For, although she had on fresh leather shoes and woolen stockings, her dress was of soft deerskin, beaded and quilled, and her face showed the coppery

tint that could come only from aboriginal blood.

Weaver shoved a man out of his path, and moved up in front of the fellow who had seized the child.

"You had better let her go back into the store," he said. "Whoever left her there will return for her."

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed the leader of the mountain men. "Here's a Yankee, boys, who knows more'n we do. Going to tell us what to do, he is! Well, well, what do you think of that?"

They all burst anew into drunken laughter, but Weaver eyed his antagonist unflinchingly. This man was better-dressed than most of the frontiersmen, and he wore a Mexican sombrero, very gaudily ornamented, instead of a fur cap. The knife and pistols at his belt, like the rifle under his arm, were adorned with silver scrollwork. He was as tall as the New Yorker, but not so broad-shouldered, and his thin, tanned face had a sour, wicked expression that went well with the reckless gleam in his narrow eyes.

"Your company is no place for a child," answered Weaver quietly. "I don't want to make trouble, but I think you had better let her wait here in the store."

The man in the sombrero thrust his face close to Weaver's.

"Well, what you think, Yankee, isn't of any account," he retorted. "Clear out before I kick you out."

"If there's any kickin' to be done that same is goin' to be Jud Timmons' work," proclaimed a labored voice at Weaver's back, and the man the New Yorker had shoved aside pushed by him, swaying grotesquely. "No greenhorn ain't a-goin' to take liberties with me. No, siree. I'm a horned toad from the Gila, I am, and rattlesnakes is my favorite friends. P'isen is my breath, and I eats Yankees by habit."

He glared around the circle, the members of which applauded him vigorously.

"All right, Jud," said the man in the sombrero. "You can have the Yankee. He hasn't touched me—yet."

WHETHER he meant to or not, his grasp on the little girl's wrist tightened as he spoke, and she cried out in anguish.

Weaver leaped at him so quickly that no man of those packed around them saw what happened, but the frontiersman reeled back, wringing the hand that had held the child, his other hand fumbling at his pistols.

"You struck me, Yankee," he said angrily. "By the eternal, that's more'n I'll stand from any man. Get back there, men. I'm a-goin' to shoot."

But, before his pistol was free, another bystander surged through the ring of mountain men and stepped to their leader's side. This newcomer Weaver thought was a gambler, for his dress tallied closely with the garb their class affected. He was young, as young as the New Yorker, and he had a dark, hawk-nosed face, proud in expression, willful even; his slender form vibrated with nervous energy. A derringer slipped down from his cuff as he passed Weaver, and lay easily in his palm.

"I saw what happened," he said, with a marked Southern accent. "This gentleman was entirely in the right, you ruffian."

"Ruffian!" bellowed the man in the sombrero. "Say, do you know who I am?"

"I don't know who you are, and I don't care. You have acted here like a ruffian; and I strongly suspect you are a coward."

Without taking his eyes off the frontiersman, he added out of the corner of his mouth to Weaver:

"Are you armed, sir?"

"No," answered the New Yorker.

"I thought not. Take this pistol, sir, and if this fellow—" he gestured contemptuously toward the man in the sombrero—"is still anxious to vindicate what he calls his honor, go ahead and give him the medicine he needs."

Weaver hesitated.

"I don't believe we need to go so far, sir," he said, "although I appreciate your friendliness. The fact is, it will not do any of us good to have a shooting brawl in the street. I would suggest that these men stand aside, and permit us to give the child into the care of some proper person."

Jud Timmons flapped both arms and crowed like a rooster.

"If you don't feel like a shootin' match, Yankee, how about a leetle rough-and-tumble?" he demanded. "Come on, boys, square away, and give us room. Me'n the Yankee's goin' to brush up the walk for the trader here, account o' his takin' care o' Kit's gal. What say?"

"I say you're a dumber fool'n I ever knowed you to be, Jed," drawled a soft voice from beyond the growing ring of spectators. "Here, folks, I got a reason for bein' inside. They tell me my leetle

gal is a-beginnin' young, settin' mountains ag'in plains, by gum! If you don't mind, stranger—thank'ee, sir. Ah, now—" as he reached the inside of the circle—"I might ha' knowed where there was trouble I'd find Raymond Cust. How air you, Señor Ramon?"

He addressed the question with a peculiar veiled emphasis to the man in the sombrero, who was glowering at all around him.

"Wa'al, now, Addie, what's wrong?" the soft-spoken man continued, without waiting for an answer.

The child sprang at him fiercely, stumbling over Weaver's feet, muttering a string of jargon in Spanish and Indian dialect.

"What say? Can't yore paw leave you for a boilin' or so jest to say howdy to an old friend? 'Tain't often I get East, and when I looked out the door, and there was Bill Sublette I jest nach'rally— How? How? Who d'you say, younker?"

He switched into her patois, and Weaver observed that many of the men around them understood the purport of what she was saying, for a crestfallen look appeared on the faces of some and others endeavored quietly to worm their way backward out of the circle.

"'Tain't so, Carson," Cust, the man in the sombrero, interrupted hotly. "The younker don't know what she's saying."

"Oh, yes, she does," rejoined Carson in a slow, cold voice. "There's Injun in her, Señor Ramon. She knows more'n any white gal. Go on, Addie."

Presently he turned to Weaver, shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot, wishing devoutly he had never interfered in what might turn out to be a mountain men's feud.

"Addie allows as how you busted in and made Cust turn her loose when he was pinchin' her and reckonin' on draggin' her off with him, stranger. Is that so?"

"I heard her crying," answered Weaver, more uncomfortable than ever. "This man—" he pointed to Cust—"was holding her, against her will, I thought, and the shopkeeper was saying that you had gone out and would return shortly. I suggested that she be left alone."

"Did you bust into Cust?" insisted Carson.

There was something uncommonly compelling about his flat face and mild blue eyes. He was a small man, spare in build, undistinguished in manner, and yet from the moment of his arrival he had dominated everyone within reach of his gentle voice.

"Why, I—I—made him let her loose," admitted Weaver, half-ashamed of himself. "But this gentleman—" he turned to indicate the man who had offered him the derringer, only to discover that worthy disappearing in the crowd—"that gentleman over there," he amended, "offered me a pistol when I was threatened."

"Much obleeged, stranger," Carson called after the vanishing frock coat.

The dark young man looked over his shoulder, with a fleeting smile that revealed fine white teeth.

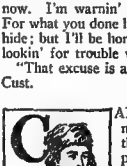
"The pleasure was all mine, sir," he replied. "But I did nothing. The Northern gentleman beside you was fully capable of handling a bully of that stamp."

He was gone as Cust opened his mouth to roar a wrathy denunciation.

"Bully! And he called me a ruffian! I'll cut the heart out of him, by——"

"You'll cut the heart out o' nobody, Señor Ramon," interrupted Carson in the same level sneer he had employed before. "You might sic a knife-thrower on him, mebbe, but I never knowed you to go direct ag'in any man that could sling a derringer out of his sleeve. And you hear to me, now. I'm warnin' you, once and for all. For what you done here I'd like to tan yore hide; but I'll be honest and admit I'm not lookin' for trouble with Don Manuel."

"That excuse is as good as any," ripped Cust.



CARSON moved a step nearer to him, and bent the full power of those pale blue eyes upon the scowling face beneath the sombrero.

"Air you aimin' to unsay that, Cust?" he asked, so low that only those nearest them could hear it.

Cust plucked at the strings of his hunting-shirt, trying hard to meet the other's glance. Finally he looked away.

"Oh, have it your own way," he muttered.

"I kinder think I will," agreed Carson. "As I was sayin', Señor Ramon, I'm not huntin' trouble with Don Manuel, and I know you'd like to bring it to me, if so be you could. But jest the same, if you cross my trail ag'in or I hear o' anything ornery from you, by hokey, I'll crop yore ha'ar. D'you hear to me?"

The flat face became a terrible threaten-

ing mask; the low-pitched voice throbbed with a hate that was appalling. Cust flinched back a pace.

"You hear to me?" Carson persisted. "I'll crop yore ha'ar. I'll scalp you, you ornery whelp. Now, git!" And as the other slouched off: "A man that'll plague a leetle gal and try to make sport of her for a lot of drunken trappers ain't a man—he ain't even a Digger Injun. I'd call him less'n a honest insect. What say, stranger?"

He smiled at Weaver. The child clinging to his hand smiled with him, and murmured a sentence in the guttural patois.

"Yes 'ndeedy, Addie. He shore is a right nice young man, and a Yankee to boot, jest like Mr. Bent. You remember Mr. Bent—and his brother, yore Uncle Charley, eh? When folks say things about Yankees, I always think of the Bents. There's two good Yankees for you, anyway. And here's a third."

He offered Weaver his hand.

"Stranger, my name's Carson, Kit to my friends, and I hail from Taos, which mebbe don't mean nothin' to you. It's a good ways in back of beyond."

He waved a hand westward.

"But I have heard of it," spoke up Weaver eagerly. "It's an Indian pueblo, isn't it, not far from Santa Fe?"

"A goodish way from Santa Fe, 'cordin' to Eastern ways of reckonin'," answered Carson. "But what I was goin' to say was that I take it right kindly of you, helpin' my leetle gal like you did."

He moved into the doorway of the store to escape the dissolving crowd, and Weaver followed him. The storekeeper had fled inside at the suggestion of shooting.

"You see, her mother up and died last winter, and, me being a trapper and hunter, I ain't got a proper home for her. So I'm bringin' her back to the settlements for my relatives to raise. Kind o' solemn to think on, ain't it, a gal child, and no mother to tell her what she ought to do and oughtn't?"

"I hope she'll be happy," was all Weaver could think of to say.

"Oh, she will, won't you, Addie? There'll be a heap of cousins to play with, and white folks' clothes to wear, and school and fixin's—and sometimes yore paw'll blow in with a Kiowa scalp or two, eh?"

He pinched her cheek and she laughed delightedly.

"Well, that reminds me, I must be gettin' the clothes I bought her," resumed the trapper. "We agreed as how she mought wear the shoes and stockin's, but we'd best make a bundle of the rest and lug 'em out to Franklin and let her aunt figure how to put 'em on. I was jest payin' the bill, and the feller was wrappin' the parcel, and I looked out the door, and there was Bill Sublette I hadn't seed since the rendezvoo on the Green in '39—or mebbe it wore '38. Anyhow, we run down the block to get a snort of likker to celebrate and swap news—and you know the rest.

"Stranger, I shore am obleeged to you. You done acted like a man, and I aim to be yore friend."

"Oh, that's all right," said Weaver awkwardly. "It wasn't anything, Mr. Carson."

"It wore a lot to me. That damn cur Cust and his friends wore drunk enough to take Addie into the next bar and feed her likker. There's nothin' meaner'n a white man turned greaser, stranger—say, what's yore name?"

"Harvey Weaver. I'm from New York."

"Stayin' here?"

"No, I had intended to trade out to Santa Fe."

Carson regarded him with increased interest.

"To Santey Fee? Wa'al, wa'al! It's a rough life, friend, but a man can stand anything if he's got the grit."

Weaver smiled mournfully.

"I hope I've got the grit, but I haven't got the coin."

"So?" said Carson. "How's that? Didn't think you could trade on nothin' at all, did you?"

"Oh, no, but I find I have only enough capital for half a wagonload."

"And cain't git credit, eh?"

"That's it."

Carson stuck his head inside the shop. "Hey, there, stranger," he shouted. "What about my leetle gal's clothes?"

The proprietor hurried forward.

"Here they are, sir, and I'm very sorry for what happened. The child became frightened when you didn't return, and she went to the door, and when my back was turned——"

"'Tweren't yore fault," said Carson briefly. "I'd oughter have known better'n to leave her; but I'm always forgettin' how cussed men can be. Injuns ain't in it with white men thataway."

He tucked the parcel under his arm, and retained his grasp on the child's hand.

"There, now! We're all fixed. You come along with us, Mr. Weaver."

"With you?" asked Weaver, bewildered. "Where?"

"We're goin' to git you them goods," replied Carson with a smile. "I'll tell you something. Credit is jest like findin' the trail to Californy. It's easy—if you know how. If you don't, the wolves and the mountain lions and grizzlies will squabble over yore bones."

II

CARSON went on talking as he guided Weaver up the street, little Addie trotting between them.

"I'd oughter tell you, Weaver, if yore plannin' to go into the Santey Fee trade, you've done made yoreself a right nasty enemy. Thisyere skunk Raymond Cust is the fotch-and-carry agent for Don Manuel Armijo, the Gov'nor of New Mexico."

"What do you mean?" interposed Weaver curiously. "That Cust is a Mexican government agent?"

Carson chuckled.

"Not by a durn sight, friend. But the Mexicans are great fellers for squeezin' all they kin out of anything they have to do with. 'Bout all the trade wuthwhile in New Mexico comes from the States to Santey Fee, and 'tain't in nature for the gov'nor, who collects the customs dues, not to dip his fingers in the profits. So what does he do? Why, he does what any other greaser'd do: he app'ints a feller to trade for him, this feller bein' able to make enough on the side for his share—and him and the guv'nor undersell the rest of the traders 'cause they don't have to pay the customs. See? And what's more'n that, they kin open up trade back to El Paso del Norte, and clean on to Chihuahua, if it happens to be profitable for 'em. As it happens, Cust is Don Manuel's agent, and it's more'n likely that if he wants to try he kin make things lively for you up the Trail."

Weaver's jaw squared, and his gray eyes hardened.

"Thanks for the warning, but it will take a bigger man than Cust to bluff me out of the trade, supposing I can really manage to get into it."

"Oh, you kin get into it," asserted Carson. "But whether you kin make enough out of it to live on, that's somethin' I can't say, nor you, neither. And don't go for to underestimate Cust. He's more Mexican than the Mexicans, and they set a heap of store by him, account he not only takes trade our fellers'd get otherwise but he acts as spy for 'em here on the river. He's a power beyond the Arkansas."

"He can't keep me out," said Weaver curtly.

Carson gave the New Yorker a keen sidewise glance.

"That's the way to talk," approved the frontiersman. "I been tellin' you this 'cause you'd oughter start all square. But I wouldn't have no use for a man that could be scared off what he intended by any snake like Cust. Did you see how he jumped whenever I called him Señor Ramon? That's what his greaser friends call him, and he knew that I knew. Huh! I'd like to see the Cheyennes workin' on him in front of a slow fire. Or mebbe the Apaches would manage him tastier; dunno but what they would. Anyways, he'd oughter be tormented good. As for you, Weaver, if he don't like you it's 'cause you stood up for Addie, and that sorter puts it up to me to stand by you, don't it?"

"Oh, no," denied Weaver. "You don't owe me——"

"I know what I owe you. And here's where I begin payin' up."

Carson came to a halt, and as Weaver looked up from the absorption in which the trapper's information had plunged him he was amazed to see again the sign: "Bent, St. Vrain & Co., Fur Traders, Wholesale and Commission Merchants."

"But I have been here," he started to say.

"That don't make no difference," snapped Carson. "Now yore a-comin' with me."

The clerks all looked up and nodded as the trapper entered, and St. Vrain, himself, came out from the small private office in the rear to receive them.

"So you are back again, Kit!" he cried. "This is a good sight. I have much to talk over with you. How is Charley? Did you see Ceran? They say the Blackfeet are making war medicine, and the Pawnees——"

"I ain't been in the Blackfeet country, so don't know about them," said Carson, "but the Pawnees are lookin' for trouble. Charley's fine. I seed Ceran onct this spring. He looked good, and his men had a good catch of beaver, considerin'. But I'll come back tonight and talk to you 'bout all that—or mebbe you'll let me leave Addie to yore house until I can take her out to her aunt in Franklin."

"Be glad to have her," assented St. Vrain cordially. "And you, too, Kit. Was Jim Bridger——?"

"Time enough for all that," broke in Carson impatiently. "Now, I want to make you acquainted with my friend, Mr. Weaver, from New York."

St. Vrain extended his hand, then, peering closer in the dim light of the store's interior, exclaimed: "I have already met Mr. Weaver. Have I not, sir? You were in here——"

"Shore he was," said Carson. "He wants a bill of goods for the Santey Fee trade and one-half on credit."

St. Vrain sat to his desk and drew forward an order-sheet.

"Of course, if he's your friend, Kit. Why didn't you mention Kit's name before, Mr. Weaver? Anything we have is his, and we'll go to any length to serve his friends."

Weaver moistened his lips. He could hardly believe his ears.

"But I never met Mr. Carson until after I left you!" he protested.

The merchant paused a moment, a whimsical smile on his square rugged features.

"That's quick work, even for Kit. What happened?"

Carson snatched the words out of the New Yorker's mouth.

"I left Addie down the street a ways in a store while I gabbed with Bill Sublette, and Raymond Cust comes along with a drunken crew and tried to take the kid. This yere greenhorn, he busted into the hull lot of them, and tore her from Cust, and when I come by him and a gambler was gettin' ready for a shootin' scrap with Don Ramon—that is, I reckon, Don Ramon was gettin' ready to think up an excuse to fade himself before the shootin' begun."

St. Vrain bestowed a warm smile upon Weaver.

"I sized you up wrong, Mr. Weaver," he acknowledged. "Thought you were too much of a tenderfoot to be dependable. But if you could outface a bunch of drunken mountain men, I'll take a chance on you, especially if Kit Carson recommends you."

"You'll be favorin' yoreself in that, Marcelin," advised Carson earnestly. "This-yere feller is the kind we can't have too many of on the Trail. When his kind git more frequent, things is goin' to be a hull lot more livable in some parts—and I shouldn't be s'prised to see Old Glory a-wavin' in places whar she's good for nothin' more'n a target nowadays."

"It was the gambler that held up Cust," said Weaver. "I had no weapons, and his pistol——"

"I give you the more credit for bustin' in when you didn't have no weapons," said Carson.

And St. Vrain nodded assent.

"But, Mr. Weaver," amended the merchant, "that is a defect in your equipment which we must remedy. The country you are going into is of a character which requires a man to be able to defend himself on very short notice."

CARSON, wandering around the room after seating the docile little Addie in a chair, stopped before a rack of weapons.

"I see you got some of those Golcher & Butler rifles like the one I bought in '40," he observed. "We better give Weaver one of them."

"They're good rifles," agreed St. Vrain doubtfully, "but they cost sixty dollars apiece, gold, and——"

"Never mind," said Carson brusquely. "I'm responsible for whatever Weaver buys. Give him one of them—here—" he opened the case, took out a gun, weighed it carefully and then handed it to the New Yorker—"and plenty of ammunition."

He stared around the room again.

"Yes, and a couple of these yere revolver-pistols."

He lifted a brace out of a packing-case as he spoke.

"Plenty more ammunition for them, too. And say, Weaver, don't forget a bullet-mould. If you ever git up into the mountains that air mought come in handy. Oh, yes, Marcellin, and give him a knife that won't bust off on the first Injun's ribs. And be shore you fill up his wagon to the tarps."

He plucked Addie off her chair and picked up her bundle.

"Thar, now, Mr. Weaver, you'd oughter git started right. I got to be goin'. Good luck to you, and keep yore eye peeled for Cust. See you tonight, Marcellin."

"Oh, but I really can't let you do all this for me," objected Weaver. "Suppose I should be killed. Mr. St. Vrain would never——"

"Said I'd be responsible, didn't I?" barked Carson. "'Tain't nothing. Yore the kind of man I always aim to step up for—take it kindly if you ever did the same for me. By the way, Marcellin—"

he stopped in the door of the private office—"you mought give the boy a line to Colonel Owens at Independence. He'll need credit for his wagon and teams, too."

St. Vrain's eyes twinkled kindly.

"I'll be mighty glad to, Kit," he agreed heartily. "Your friend deserves all the help he can be given."

Weaver made to follow the frontiersman.

"I don't want to seem ungrateful," he protested again, "but you are doing too much for me, Mr. Carson. I haven't done anything——"

Carson halted in the doorway.

"Say, d'you know how I feel about you?" he challenged. "I'd be plumb satisfied to shell out my coin for you after what you done for Addie."

He appealed to St. Vrain.

"Marcellin, you knowed her mother. Alice wore Arapaho, but I never seed the white woman that was fit to pray beside her. And—and—she's gone. And Addie's her gal—and she asked me to take good care of the kid. And I allowed I would. Well, fust time it come to a showdown I didn't take good care of Addie. You did, Weaver. Which means you done what I'd oughter have done. That's a debt cain't be paid off, not in goods nor coin it cain't; but I'll jest figure on bein' able to make it up to you in some other way some day out on the Trail. Git it straight, friend: you don't owe me nothin' for this business here."

He smiled grimly.

"Marcellin owes us both. He's the one in debt, 'cause I've brought him a durn good customer."

He was gone before either could answer him. St. Vrain laughed at the look of astonished concern on the New Yorker's face, and waved him to a chair.

"That was like Kit, Mr. Weaver. He's as fine and honorable a man as lives on the frontier, knows the mountains, too, and gets on well with the Mexicans—without selling out to their corrupt government as Cust and his kind do, at that. You'll find him a valuable friend."

"I don't know what to make of it," admitted Weaver. "It doesn't seem as though I deserved this. When I left you not an hour ago I was completely downhearted. And then, just because I—just because I——"

"You are living by frontier standards now," St. Vrain put in kindly. "We conduct business by different standards from the East. Here the hazards are necessarily greater. And we must rely to a considerable extent upon the test of human dependability rather than dollars and cents. I would really a great deal rather give you credit, now that I know something about you and have Kit's assurance as to your character, than extend the same resources to another man who came in to me with letters from bankers whose names meant nothing to me, aside from their financial connections."

"But if I should die——"

"My dear sir; if you should unfortunately be slain on your projected venture, I should write off the debt. It is a chance I take. My partners and I are interested in seeing the Santa Fe trade placed upon a secure, businesslike basis, and it is a justifiable speculation to give you the opportunity to entrench yourself in it."

Relieved to some extent at hearing that his sponsor would not be obliged to make good any losses his failure might entail, Weaver drew forward his chair and entered with gusto into the task of selecting the goods for his enterprise.

"If you will be guided by me," advised St. Vrain, "you will avoid luxuries and nicknacks, and concentrate your available means on the necessities of the New Mexicans: cambrics, linens, cottons, cashmeres, drills, lawns, flannel and serge, with some men's shirts, fancy, plain and flannel, and a few simple articles of clothing. Thus, although you may not be able to sell off in a hurry, you will have goods which will be certain of selling in the long run, and you can, in a pinch, dispose of them to other merchants."

"I shall appreciate your advice more than I can say," replied Weaver. "I am sure it will save me a great deal of trouble."

An hour and a half later he left St. Vrain's office with a duplicate list of his purchases in his pocket, and beside them a letter to Colonel S. C. Owens at Independence, whose business was the furnishing of equipment to traders and emigrants, inviting assistance of his requirements, not only in the potent name of Bent, St. Vrain & Co., but of Kit Carson—which, as Weaver was soon to learn, had a magic effect on the frontier. His goods, baled and wrapped, were to be shipped to Independence on the next day's steamer, aboard which he, himself, was to fare on the first stage of his progress into that vague land of mystery variously termed "beyond the frontier," "the desert," "the Injun country."

As he traversed the streets to his hotel

his mind harked back to the slim youth whom Carson had called "the gambler," who had offered him the derringer to use on Cust. He kept a vigilant watch, both in the street and in the lobby of the hotel; but the glossy hat and trim frock-coat were not in evidence.

"Wish I could see him," he thought as he ate a lonely meal. "I'd like to thank him for that. Cust might have shot me before Carson came up. I must practice with those revolvers."

III

THE first thing Weaver did after surrendering his ticket at the end of the *Prairie Belle's* gangplank was to seek out his goods amongst the litter of cargo on the lower deck. His heart thumped with pride as he identified the small heap of boxes, bolts and bales marked: "Harvey Weaver or order, Owens' Landing, Mo." But he was puzzled by the address, and halted one of the crew for an explanation.

"You're headed for the Trail?" responded the man. "Sure, that's right, then. Independence is back seven miles from the Landing, and if you're intendin' to pull out right smart they ain't no sense in sendin' your stuff all the way into the town."

"How far is the Landing from the state line?" asked Weaver, hungry for information.

"Twenty miles to Fitzhugh's Prairie, and that's the last house in the state," rejoined his informant. "Matter of fact, I reckon it's the last white man's house this side of Bent's Fort. Nothin' between 'cept buf'ler and Injuns."

And he hastened away, leaving Weaver more excited than ever. The New Yorker was still examining his possessions with the zest of the beginner when a pleasant voice spoke at his elbow.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but aren't you the gentleman who came forward to help the little Indian girl yesterday afternoon?"

Weaver spun around to confront the young fellow who had proffered him the derringer.

"Yes," he answered, "and I want to thank you for what you did. If it hadn't been for you I suppose the scoundrel would have shot me."

The other laughed. His voice had the liquid, slurring intonation of the South, and he carried himself with an ease that the New Yorker secretly envied.

"Oh, I fancy you would have taken care of yourself. Are you going west?"

Weaver tried to suppress the note of triumph in his own reply.

"I'm going into the Santa Fé trade. These are my goods."

A flattering expression of envy overspread the Southerner's features.

"By jove, what luck! I never thought of that, but I suppose a man has to do something out there."

He waved in the general direction of the frontier.

"I guess that's right," agreed Weaver, laughing. "And about all there is to do beyond the settlements, of course, is trapping, hunting or trading."

"Yes," said the Southerner. "A man wouldn't starve, perhaps, if he was a good shot, but it's better to have something definite to do."

A shadow crossed his expressive face.

"Why don't you go into it?" queried Weaver. "Into the Santa Fé trade, I mean."

"Haven't any money—or not much, anyway," returned the other, succinctly. "The fact is, I've been turned out of my home." His tone became suddenly bitter. "Not that I didn't deserve it. But that doesn't make it any easier."

"I'm sorry," said Weaver. "And if I had any money of my own I'd gladly give it to you—after what you did for me yesterday."

"That was nothing," denied the Southerner. "I should have been glad of a little trouble. It would have livened up things."

"It was a lot," insisted Weaver. "That little girl belonged to a mountain man named Carson, and it was he who got me the credit that enabled me to purchase these goods."

"Fine," exclaimed the Southerner. "That's the first sensible job I've ever had my hand in, I guess."

"It's funny," said Weaver apologetically, "but do you know, I had you figured out to be a gambler?"

The other stared at him, then laughed shortly.

"Well, you are a good judge of men, my friend," he answered, "for that is just what I am. Oh, no, not professionally, I mean." The bitter note in his voice became a trifle haughty. "I am a gentleman, if blood means anything nowadays. But I couldn't keep my hands off the cards. My father

paid up for me until he was tired, and then turned me out."

Weaver was not sure what he ought to say in reply to this confession. The Southerner, he hazarded, was not the sort of man who spilled his secret into every available ear, and, indeed, his acquaintance's next words said as much.

"You'll think me a gambler to be bothering you with my own troubles. I apologize, sir. You're the first human being I've spoken to of them, and why I picked on you is more than I can explain."

"Maybe it was because I like you," said Weaver. "Fate seems to have thrown us together, doesn't it?"

The Southerner eyed him curiously, as if estimating his sincerity.

"You mean that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Weaver, "otherwise, I wouldn't have spoken."

"By jove, I believe you!"

"And what's more," Weaver continued, impulsively, "I've got a suggestion to make. I'm new to this business. Suppose you and I hitch up together, and see what we can do? Two heads ought to be better than one."

"But I haven't any goods to match with yours—or any experience in merchandising. If it was trading niggers, now. Or cotton. But this stuff—I don't know a thing about it!"

"Well, you're a good shot, I take it, and handy and quick-witted," reasoned Weaver. "What you don't know I do, and what I don't know you do. So we're a good match."

THE Southerner pondered this, leaning gracefully on the slight cane he carried. He was dressed in the height of the prevailing mode, his garments well-cut and fresh-brushed. A carpet-bag was on the deck at his feet.

"I like your idea," he said at last; "but I've got to match you fairly. Tell you what. There'll be a game or two on in the bar, and I'll see if I can't turn what I have left into something better."

Weaver shook his head vigorously.

"No, no! If that's what you left home for, keep away from it. It's a bad way to begin over again, going back to the very cause of your trouble."

The Southerner nodded carelessly.

"What you say I can't dispute, but it is also true that now and then a man must steer away from the obvious. Now, if I am to make something of myself and acquire new habits I need capital for trading purposes. Thanks to the way I was brought up—which was no fault of mine, and is my one source of complaint against my father's repudiation of me—I know of but one way in which to make money. That is by gambling. And I am, sir, despite the combination of ill-luck which drove me North, a fairly skilful gambler, for an amateur."

"Upstairs you'll find professionals," warned Weaver. "More likely than not, they'll cheat."

"Quite so," admitted the other cheerfully. "And I shall be careful to avoid those gentlemen. There'll be enough of my own kidney for me to play with."

"But if you lose what you have——"

The other shrugged.

"Why, I sha'n't be much worse off."

"You can come with me, in any case. I guess I can manage to feed the pair of us, at least."

The Southerner's hand shot out, and gripped Weaver's with a strength that was surprising in one of his slight frame.

"Sir," he said, "I shall never again allow any man to say in front of me that a Yankee tradesman cannot be a gentleman. Your offer is couched with such courtesy as prohibits a refusal, even were I so churlish or ill-disposed as to be loath to accept it. My name is Henri de Rastignac. I am of New Orleans, where, I may truthfully add, my family are not without repute."

Harvey laughed good-naturedly.

"I come from New York, and my name is Harvey Weaver—but the only way any repute is going to attach to it is if I make a fortune on the Trail."

De Rastignac looked as though he suspected Harvey had intended a gibe at him in this declaration, but he decided to ignore it, picked up his carpet-bag and slung it on top of the New Yorker's goods.

"We are both of us young," he said, very dignifiedly. "It is natural that whatever success we may attain lies in the future. But when I spoke of repute, Weaver, I did not refer to wealth, but to honor and decency. I think you are as well-equipped with that as myself. If I did not think so, I should not invite your company."

He walked off before Weaver could answer him, and Harvey rubbed his jaw, half between puzzlement and resentment.

"There's a Southerner for you," mut-

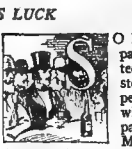
tered the New Yorker. "Always talking about honor. Always airing his own superiority. Always hunting for trouble. Well, he looks as though he might be a good chum, if I handle him right. I guess I'll just have to be careful of what I say, that's all. 'Invite my company!' Huh, I thought it was I did the inviting."

But at this point in his reflections the boat's whistle sounded to give notice to the river traffic that it was backing out into the stream, and he abandoned his goods for a farewell look at St. Louis and an inspection of his fellow-passengers.

The *Prairie Belle* was crowded like all west-bound boats at this season, and by far the majority of her passengers wore buckskin or the rough dress of teamsters and farmers. Here and there an army officer's uniform stood out by contrast. A stray banker or merchant seemed oddly out of place; an Indian's feathered headdress was a vivid splash of color, and much more in harmony with the picture. Aft, where the furnaces were located, the negro firemen were hurling huge chunks of wood into the gaping doors, whence came a mighty roaring. The wheel at the stern went *slap-slap-plop-slap-slap-plop*, and despite its labors and a steady shower of sparks from the tall twin stacks, the boat made only sluggish headway against the tremendous current.

Weaver found plenty to occupy his attention. Ashore, the huddled town was dwindling slowly; the banks showed scarred and yellow in places from the punishment the river had dealt them; passengers tramped around the decks, stood in groups, arguing, shouting, singing, debating. There was very little restraint, for, so far as Weaver could see, there was not a single woman on board. The frontier, he realized with a start, was a man's world.

He noted that all the buckskin-clad mountain men and trappers, and the great majority of the teamsters and settlers, had guns and knives belted to them, and this reminded him that his own weapons were in a separate package with the rest of his goods on the lower deck. It might be as well if he equipped himself according to custom, even though, as he ruefully admitted, he scarcely knew how to load and fire the hand-guns. As for the knife, he privately regarded it with perturbation; he had never so much as butchered a chicken in his town-bred life. But at least it was time he began to learn to wear weapons with some pretense of habitude.



SO HE strolled forward, passing on his way the teeming bar, and he stopped a moment to peer inside. It was hazy with tobacco smoke and packed to suffocation. Men stood two rows deep at the counter, and were jammed around the tables scattered at intervals over the floor space. The racket of voices was deafening, but through it periodically rang the shrill summons of the bartenders and waiters: "What'll yeh have, gents?" "Name yore p'ison, Mister." "You're next, there."

Most of the tables were centers of gambling, and after raking the room several times Weaver finally identified de Rastignac sitting in the far corner with a group including a merchant as natty as himself, an Army officer, a couple of men the New Yorker guessed to be prosperous traders or farmers, and one or two more. Weaver was tempted to join the circle surrounding this game; men joined it rapidly, and most of those who came up seemed to stay. But he decided that his presence probably would serve to distract de Rastignac's attention from the cards, and moreover, might be construed by the Southerner as an attempt to watch over him.

"This is one time when friendship means leavin' the other man to paddle his own canoe," Weaver murmured to himself, and passed on forward along the deck.

The companionway was in sight when a band of mountain men swirled out of the entrance to the dining-saloon, howling and singing and waving the bottles from which they had been drinking with copious generosity. Weaver prudently stood back against the rail; the rioters were headed for the bar, and he had no disposition to run the risk of another quarrel with their kind. But a snarling voice hailed him at once, and checked the drunken procession.

"Here's the Yankee greenhorn that thought he could come it high over the mountain men! Hey, Jud Timmons, he burked you good yesterday."

Cust swept his followers behind him with two swings of his arms, and so formed a cleared space half the width of the deck. The Mexican agent's green eyes glittered wickedly.

"What are you going to do, Jud?" he demanded. "Yesterday you daresn't touch him. What about today?"

"Nobody darest to say daresn't to Jud Timmons!" screeched the trapper from the

midst of the band. "Let me out, you hellions. Gangway for Jud Timmons, the livin' lightnin'-bolt, the terror of the prairies, the right-hand of old Mister Death. Whoopee! I'm a-comin', men. Watch the sparks fly from my heels, and the cinders out'n my mouth. I sleep with wildcats, and eat grizzlies for breakfast."

He staggered through the front rank of his friends, and teetered on heels and toes, glaring at Weaver, who continued to lean against a stanchion, trying to appear cool, but figuring busily the best policy to pursue.

"There he is, Jud," said Cust, slapping the squat, thick-set trapper on the shoulder. "He's your meat. Show us what you can do to him. Kit Carson isn't here to——"

Jud shook his head like an angry bull.

"Kit's a good feller, and a friend of mine," he snorted. "And when it comes to fightin' Injuns I'm willin' to sit back and let him do the shoutin'. But greenhorns Kit don't know, never havin' seen much of the breed, and I aim to educate promiscuous thisyere gingey-ha'ared, slab-sided, dough-faced Yankee what thinks he can come into the frontier and own it, b'gad!"

He belched a roar at Weaver and started forward clumsily, with arms stretched wide and fingers clawed.

"Tremble in yore boots, Yankee! Hear to the trickle of yore heart a-meltin'. Kiss good-by to that thar right ear of yore'n, 'cause I'm a-goin' to bite it off. Whoopee, here I come!"

"It's his own fault, if he gets into trouble," called Weaver.

Cust laughed derisively, and the remainder of the band echoed him.

"Threats ain't given earroom on the frontier, greenhorn," jeered Gust. "Don't hurt him too bad, Jud. Just throw him overboard and let him swim ashore. That'll teach him he don't belong in these parts."

Jud pranced solemnly around the New Yorker.

"No," he insisted drunkenly. "I'm not a-goin' to put him overboard. I'm a-goin' to tear him and rend him, and bite the heart out'n him, and sculp him for luck."

Weaver was in doubt how seriously he should take these bloody threats, although he perceived that he could expect no assistance from any of the nearby passengers, who were all anxious to avoid the animosity of the lawless band. He was uneasy, but not fearful, for one of his diversions at home had been the free-for-all wrestling and boxing matches at the firehouse, and he was really a little better than most at rough-and-tumble fighting.

"Why don't you do the fighting yourself, Cust?" he asked the ringleader of the mountain men, leaving his own position by the rail, and crouching to withstand the trapper.

"You stand up to Jud first," returned Cust. "Then it'll be time to talk about me."

"All right," snapped Weaver. "Come on, you, Jud. Come on!"

He darted in close, ducked under the trapper's flapping arms, caught him below the waist and shot him almost horizontally backward. *Crash!* Timmons smashed into the rail, shoulder first. There was a creak of wood as a whole section gave way, and the trapper tottered on the deck's edge for a moment, then plunged overside. Weaver, turning to see what had become of his foe, was amazed as any.

"Man overboard!" he shouted, and ran to the stanchion against which he had been leaning.

Aft a few feet a pair of arms in buckskin waved above the water and went under. The stern-wheel was dangerously close, and Weaver acted as instinctively as when he had responded to the child's cry the day before. He jumped, feet first.

THE yellow water closed over his head; but he kept his wits about him, and endeavored to straighten out to swim down-stream in the direction in which he knew the current must be carrying the trapper. A loud and prolonged thunder in his ears was the stern-wheel. If he might only escape those threshing paddles!

He came up in a belt of foam, the wake. Behind him voices called faintly. But he looked in front, down-stream. Yes, there was one of those buckskin arms. Jud Timmons was making a plucky fight for it, and Weaver wondered mechanically why he could not do better. To the New Yorker the unstemmed current of the Mississippi seemed at first no worse than the tide-race of Hell Gate which he had swum, despite parental orders, ever since he was of an age to run away from his father's shop in the East Ward. He struck out vigorously, and soon was able to clutch an armful of shirt.

"Keep your hands off me," he panted. "I'll slug you if you touch me."

Jud nodded weakly.

"Snag—over—thar. Rest on—it—till ——"

The trapper started to sink again, and Weaver tightened his grip on the buckskin shirt, heading diagonally across the current for the partially submerged tree-trunk Jud had indicated. It was a good idea. Astraddle the snag they could keep afloat until the *Prairie Belle* was able to turn and waddle back to them. But after a dozen strokes Weaver decided that the Mississippi was more of a proposition than the East River, and when he actually threw his free arm across the gnarled bark of the snag he was so tired that only the determination of his will enabled him to retain his grasp on Jud's shirt. At last, when he had pumped his lungs full of air, he dragged Jud higher, flung a leg over the trunk, used a branch for a bridle to support himself in this most precarious position, and helped the gasping trapper to a seat of equal safety.

For a while Jud was occupied in ridding himself of the river-water he had swallowed. Then he wiped the mud out of his eyes, and surveyed his rescuer with an astonishment that was comical.

"Sculp me for a Crow squaw! Yo're the Yankee!"

"That's right," assented Weaver. "You were going to eat my heart or something like that, and I thought a wetting would cool your appetite."

The trapper laughed with silent abandon.

"Wa'al, wa'al, thisyere joke's on me, Yankee—and the drinks, too. You shore have made me look like Sim Hathaway arter the Utes finished with him." He sobered. "But have I got it figgered straight? Did you put me over—and then come arter me?"

"Something like that," acknowledged Weaver. "But I won't do it for you again; and if I ever get my fingers on that fellow Cust, who set you on——"

"I don't blame you none," said Jud humbly. "I wore in likker, stranger, and any man'll tell you—Kit Carson, for one—that when I'm in likker I talk rough and ride high. But it don't mean much. I dunno jest what I said to you, but if I'd throwed you I mebbe would have mussed yore ha'ar a bit, that's all. As for Cust, he's all you said, and I dunno but what I oughter be ashamed to let myself git drunk on his likker. I sorter run short of cash money t'other day, and Cust was gatherin' the mountain men around and he wanted me to come along, and I—wa'al, stranger, I jest came. He's wusser'n a bad greaser,'n a bad greaser's wusser'n a Cheyenne."

"That's not an understatement," commented Weaver. "Here's the steamer. They're going to throw us a rope."

The trapper offered a wet and hairy paw.

"Stranger," he said, "I'd like fine to be yore friend. Don't you worrit yoreself none about Cust. I'll 'tend to him."

"I don't want you to 'tend to him. I'll 'tend to him——"

"Now, now, young feller, you leave things to Jud Timmons. Yo're a greenhorn, when all's said, ain't you? Wa'al, Cust is right tough meat for yore jaws. Shore, I know you kin lick him, but down the Trail he's——"

"I know about him."

"Do, eh? Wa'al, then, you hadn't oughter need argyin' with. Leave him to me. I'll fix him so's he'll leave you be. What more do you crave?"

"To punch his jaw!"

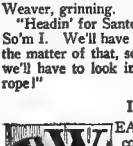
Jud gurgled throatily.

"Hear to the young cock! Say, young feller, yo're a borned mountain man."

"I'm a born Santa Fé trader," returned Weaver, grinning.

"Headin' for Santey Fee? Wa'al, now! So'm I. We'll have to look into this. For the matter of that, so's Cust. Yes, sirree, we'll have to look into—hy, grab that air rope!"

IV



WEAVER was mildly concerned to discover that instead of being hailed as a hero aboard the *Prairie Belle* most of her company regarded him as a nuisance. The captain stuck his head out of the pilot-house as the two men were hauled from the water.

"Hey, you tenderfoot!" he shouted angrily. "The next time you want to wrastle on my deck you throw yore man in'arda. Hear me? If there'd only been one o' you I'd have let him drown. Sarve you right, too."

"There ought to be some means of keeping law and order on your boat, Captain," spoke up one of the merchants, no less irritated. "We'll be all of an hour late, thanks to this young man's foolishness."

"'Twaren't the younker's fault," expostulated Jud. "I done started the ruckus, Cap'n."

"I don't give a damn who started it," growled the captain. "Next man who starts anything I'll put to work in the firegang."

Weaver felt the hot blood stinging the back of his neck, notwithstanding the soaking to which he had been subjected.

"Say," he called up to the captain, "if you think any old tinhorn like you can threaten me for defending myself against a lot of drunken ruffians that you ought to have kept under confinement, you've got to——"

Jud caught him by the arm, and dragged him into the shadow of the overhang of the texas.

"Hey, don't you never git enough scrappin', younker?" demanded the trapper. "Theseyere cap'ns don't amount to much mostly, but when you do git a bad one he's p'ison. Come on back to the fireroom and dry off."

"I want to see Cust first," objected Weaver, pulling away from his escort.

"No, you don't. What's more, you wouldn't be able to find him. Señor ain't the feller to invite a hairy buf'ler like you to toss him on yore horns. He's under cover—holed up in a cabin, most likely. And you remember what I done tole you in the water: Cust is bad medicine for a greenhorn with his way to make. He does more business on the Trail than any of us, more'n Colonel Owens. Yessirree, I reckon he does as much as all the other traders together, if you leave out Owens."

"Well, whoever he is, he can't make trouble for me and keep a whole hide," rapped Weaver. "I'm peaceable, if I'm let alone, but I won't be made a monkey of."

"Shore, shore," soothed Jud, leading the New Yorker on aft. "Yo're dead-right, but you'll be righter onct you git the water out of yore clothes."

There was a good deal of truth in Jud's assertion. As the wet was steamed out of him in the fierce heat radiating from the furnace-doors Weaver experienced a substantial moderation of temper. He was a stranger in a strange land, in the strangest of all strange lands, and it behooved him to walk warily. Rather than pursue trouble, he decided, he had better let it follow him, if it must. Also, he was warmed in heart by the trapper's blunt friendliness and desire to atone for his quarrelsomeness.

Jud Timmons was a typical mountain man, outwardly gruff and coarse; inwardly, kind and generous—one of the tireless breed of trail-breakers who had thrown open the fastnesses of the Rockies and uncovered the most remote corners of the wilderness of the West. He knew the continent from the Rio Bravo of the Mexican frontier, which men were beginning to call the Rio Grande, to the snow peaks of the British border, and from the Mississippi settlements on the edge of the prairies to the California presidios and pueblos.

He had a great fund of anecdotes which he recounted to divert his new friend; and a number of his cronies, who came down to the fireroom to see how the rescued pair did, chimed in with him and tried to show the New Yorker that he had won his footing in their estimation. They all acclaimed the greenhorn's purpose in entering the Santa Fé trade, and chuckled slyly at the discomfiture the tidings would bring to Señor Ramon.

"His likker's good," reflected Jud, "but I cain't think of nothin' else to talk him up for, eh, boys?"

There was a general growl of assent.

"If he is so disliked, why is he successful?" demanded Weaver.

"'Tain't everybody dislikes him," answered Jud. "The greasers think he's prime. And if a man's got money, it don't much matter if he's not liked. He kin do pretty well what he chooses, so long as he dodges lead. And Señor Ramon is one quick lead-dodger. When he hears a feller is after him, he most gen'rally fixes up a lettle knife-throwin' or mebbe a shot in the dark. He has plenty to do his dirty work."

They talked on until the engineer ordered them forward. Jud invited Weaver to join in a game on a blanket spread in a sheltered corner of the lower deck, but the New Yorker excused himself on the plea that he must look up a friend. And indeed, he was concerned about de Rastignac. It was late afternoon, the *Prairie Belle* long since had turned out of the Mississippi's channel into the wider spread of the yellow Missouri, and was plodding sturdily against the terrific current. And he had not seen the Southerner since the forenoon.

A VISIT to the bar failed to reveal the man from New Orleans; he was not in the dining-saloon or in any of the more frequented parts of the deck. Thoroughly worried, Weaver set himself to combing the steamer from bow to stern. He was rewarded a quarter of an hour later by discovering a forlorn figure

draped over the after rail of the texas. Defeat was spelled in every line of de Rastignac's pose; his eyes were fixed gloomily on the churning paddles of the stern-wheel; he was oblivious of Weaver's presence until the New Yorker addressed him.

"I suppose you lost. I'm sorry, de Rastignac."

"Nobody else is," retorted the gambler. "And it serves me right."

His fingers opened and shut spasmodically.

"I was five hundred dollars to the good once."

"What have you now?"

"I don't know. Perhaps ten dollars."

Weaver eyed him keenly.

"You are hungry," said the New Yorker. "I suppose you have had oceans of whisky and practically no food since morning."

The other nodded.

"That's the kind of a fool I am."

"You can say that, de Rastignac; but all I can say is that I think you'd be better off for a meal, as I should be, myself."

More to distract the Southerner's attention than anything else, he described his adventure with the trapper.

De Rastignac's face lighted up eagerly at the first hint of belligerence, and he strode forward with Weaver, flicking his cane against his legs and interjecting curt questions and comments as the tale unfolded.

"And I was gambling away what remaining resources I had while you were winning a new friend!" he exclaimed. "Weaver, this is a lesson to me. The first time you needed me I——"

"I don't see what you could have done," interrupted Weaver. "There might have been a bigger row——"

"There would have been one or two dead trappers," said the Southerner coldly. "Do you suppose I should have permitted them to lay a finger on me?"

Weaver's eyes widened.

"Do you mean you would have shot—offhand?"

"What else could a gentleman do? But I forget! I apologize, sir, if my remark seemed to reflect upon yourself. Perhaps the duello is not recognized in your part of the North. I have been told that such is occasionally the case."

"It is not," Weaver replied dryly. "And I advise you to be careful how you use your pistols. I should be very sorry if anyone had shot Jud Timmons. He is going to be a good friend to both of us."

De Rastignac was perplexed.

"A situation such as you outlined cannot be common, my dear sir," he objected. "But at any rate, I trust you have no criticism to make if I search out this man Cust at my earliest opportunity and give him occasion to send me a challenge. He is certainly offensive, and I am inclined to think it would be advantageous to remove him from our path, in view of what you ——"

"If you 'remove him from our path'," retorted Weaver, "I gather from Jud Timmons and Mr. Carson you will make it impossible for us to get into the Mexican settlements."

"That's to be taken into consideration," admitted de Rastignac. "Yet it is quite likely that I shall not be able to travel with you, Weaver. And if I am so unlucky——"

"Nonsense," protested the New Yorker. "Of course, you'll travel with me. Why not?"

"I beg your pardon," said the other stiffly. "But it would hardly be proper for me to accept of what I can only term charity at your hands. A partnership on an even basis is one thing. What you offer is entirely different."

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Weaver.

"What I should have done an hour ago," replied the Southerner. "Return to the scene of my recent defeat, and stake what I have left on one final effort."

Weaver was unable longer to restrain his impatience.

"You must be crazy," he exclaimed. "You say, yourself, you have but ten dollars left. If that goes you will be penniless."

"Sir, I am aware of that fact."

Weaver caught his arm.

"You mustn't take offense," pleaded the New Yorker. "Lord, what a temper you have! Mine is bad enough, but it isn't in the same class with yours. Come, now, do listen to reason! I am your friend, and——"

"I will freely admit your contention, Weaver," said de Rastignac, implacably, "yet I cannot allow your friendship, welcome and courteous though it may be, to divert me from what I believe to be the proper course of conduct for a gentleman to follow in the circumstances in which I find myself. With ten dollars it is inconceivable that I should be able to follow you on the venture you have in mind. It is my desire to do so, however, and I am resolved to employ the only means I have at

hand to increase my resources—or else lose what little I have remaining. You will concede that I shall be no worse off than I am if I do lose my slight capital."

Weaver tossed up his hands in despair.

"You are the darnedest fellow I ever knew! All right, go on. What I say doesn't matter. But do consent to one thing, please."

"What is that, sir?"

"Come in and have dinner with me. I suppose you will be playing all night, if you have luck. You can't do that satisfactorily on an empty stomach."

The Southerner reflected upon this until they had reached the saloon-door.

"I believe it is permissible for me to accept an invitation offered in so kindly a fashion," he decided. "I may say, Weaver, that I do not doubt the genuine friendliness of your attitude throughout our discussion; and if I do not heed you, you must conceive that it is because I am obliged to follow the guidance of my own conscience. A man, sir, who makes pretense to being a devotee of sport and the hazards of chance, must not allow himself to be daunted so long as he has a card to turn or a bet to stake."

"I should think you would have had enough experience of that sort of thing," said Weaver.

De Rastignac sighed as he sank into a seat at one of the dining-tables beside his friend.

"I shall hope to have the courage never to touch a card again, if I ever disentangle myself from this situation. But it will be time to discuss that when I reach so incredible a state of financial freedom."

They discussed a variety of matters during dinner, exchanging reminiscences of life in New York and New Orleans. Weaver maintained a constant watch for Cust or any of his trapper companions, but none of them appeared before he and de Rastignac left the saloon. He parted with his friend at the door of the bar.

"See here," he exclaimed with the impulsiveness which was the key to his disposition, "I have some money, more than enough to get me to Owens Landing, and there I won't need——"

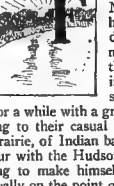
The Southerner smiled faintly.

"I am not that sort, sir. But your offer is of a piece with the other friendliness you have shown me. I shall not forget."

He hesitated.

"And I beg you will not misunderstand me if I do not ask you to come with me. The—er—experience will be sufficiently trying, without the knowledge that you are sharing it at first-hand with me."

"I wouldn't go in there for a million dollars," returned Weaver candidly.



FOR an hour or two the New Yorker amused himself by strolling the deck and viewing the magnificent spectacle of the river and its banks in the glow of the sunset. Then he lounged for a while with a group of trappers, listening to their casual tales of mountain and prairie, of Indian battles and struggles for fur with the Hudson's Bay Company, trying to make himself believe that he was really on the point of entering the wild life they made so familiar. Toward midnight he stole up to the shining windows of the bar, and strove to distinguish de Rastignac through the clouds of smoke and foul air.

De Rastignac was not visible, but most of the scores of men in the confined space were gathered about the corner table at which the Southerner had been playing earlier in the day, and as Weaver turned away he overheard the comments of two who were coming out on deck for a walk before bedding down wherever there was room.

"Never seed a game run so."

"Yeh, that N'Oleans feller won't quit. Been cleaned out twicet, they say."

Weaver dragged himself to his own blankets, which he spread on the pile of his goods, his sole worldly possessions. He saw to it that de Rastignac's carpet-bag was safely stowed at his elbow, and then composed himself to sleep, lulled by the murmur of the river.

"I'm glad I'm not a gambler, anyway," he said to himself. "Gosh, what a way to live!"

He was awakened by a hand tugging at his arm, a voice in his ear.

"Eh Eh? What is it? What do you want?" He sat up, half-blinded by the glare of the new-risen sun, and gradually he discerned de Rastignac's face, bending over him. And what a face! Gaunt, hollow-cheeked, lips drawn wolfishly tight over set teeth, a stubble of beard on the chin, a look of utter weariness in the red-rimmed eyes.

"Here! Take this!" The Southerner spoke with unaccustomed roughness, and looking down, Weaver saw that a bundle of notes and a purse of coin were being thrust into his hands. "Take it—and don't give

it to me. Do you hear? Don't give it to me, no matter what I say, until we get to Owens Landing."

"You won?" asked Weaver doubtingly.

"Yes. I wore them all out."

There was very little triumph in the metallic laugh.

"I remember—father used to say—man who flicks the cards longest is bound to ——"

And de Rastignac gently toppled over on top of the pile of bales. Weaver scrambled aside and covered the Southerner with his discarded blankets.

"Dead-beat! And no wonder! Golly, I wonder how much he has here?"

There was nobody within eyeshot at the immediate moment, and he deftly counted over the sum his friend had entrusted to him. There were one thousand one hundred and fifty dollars in bills and three hundred and seventy-five dollars in gold.

"More than fifteen hundred dollars! And all in one night! Say, that's luck for you. It took me two years to scrape up seven hundred dollars."

Weaver was conscious of a nagging sense of unfairness. Then he looked down at the harrowed face he had propped against the carpet-bag; and the Northerner slowly shook his head.

"No, I guess I'm better off as I am. I didn't need to ask somebody else to keep my seven hundred for me."

V

IF DE RASTIGNAC was tempted to trench upon his new-won capital during the tedious trip up the Missouri he contrived to conceal his feelings in the face of frequent opportunities, for the story of his coup went the rounds of the *Prairie Belle's* company, and overnight he became as famous as Weaver, "the Yankee greenhorn who ducked the mountain man." To all invitations to participate in the games of the bar or chance deck-corners he replied courteously that he was sorry, but despite his extraordinary run of luck he did not at that instant have the good fortune to possess a dollar in his clothes. Several men thereupon offered to stake him in a new venture, on the basis of an equal division of his winnings, but his cold refusal soon discouraged such propositions.

"I am not a professional gambler, sir," he said haughtily. "It is probable that you do not intend to be offensive, and therefore I overlook for this once what I could not brook a second time. I bid you good day, sir."

He was called a "fire-eater," a "hot-head," a "damned duelist"—and he was also let severely alone.

Cust gave Weaver and the Southerner a wide berth. Whenever the Mexican agent did show himself on deck he was surrounded by a knot of the toughest of the mountain men, who, Jud explained, were his particular familiars. Several were Mexican and French breeds; one was a half-breed Apache, known as Little Pete, a low-browed, snakey-eyed creature, whose lank hair hung all around his face. He was notorious as a knife-fighter. "But he most gen'rally kills his man a-throwin', not a-stabbin'," commented Jud.

To young men who had their future careers at stake the stern-wheeler's dilatory progress seemed uncommonly exasperating, what with the hourly battle against the turbulent current, the hundreds of miles of tortuous channels, infested with snags and sand-bars, the frequent halts for wood, for provisions, to discharge or take on freight and passengers; but all journeys have an end, and so, in due course, the *Prairie Belle* rammed her nose into the bluff at Owens Landing, dropped her gangplank and put ashore a riotous troop of travelers, spirits flogged high by the relief from confinement and the proximity of the final frontier.

Weaver saw to the shifting of his goods and their bestowal on the bluff, and then, with Jud for a guide, he and de Rastignac walked up a muddy road toward Colonel Owens' spreading corrals and log-walled trading station.

"Will you have your money back, Henri?" questioned the New Yorker—they had worked down to given names by this time.

The Southerner shook his head.

"Not yet, Harv. Let's see if Colonel Owens can't be persuaded to take it over from you."

Jud snorted amusedly.

"Don't you worrit yoreself about that air, young feller. The colonel ain't tight, but he kin always be argyed into takin whatever's offered him."

"I was told he'd give me credit for my outfit," said Weaver, perturbed. "Mr. St. Vrain wrote me a letter——"

"Oh, if Marcellin spoke up for you, with Kit Carson, too, you needn't worry," the trapper reassured him. "But he'll

wring ev'ry cent he can git out of Henry here, 'cause he shore is hell on gambling."

"I don't see that the method by which I acquired my money is of any concern to him," said de Rastignac.

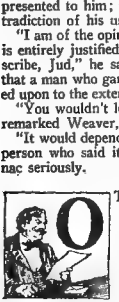
"Mebbe 'tain't, but jest the same he won't give credit to anybody he knows for a gambler. Why, he keeps a watch on fellers he gives credit to, 'twixt here and Fitzhugh's Prairie, and them as drinks or gambles has got to pay on the nail afore they pull out for the rendeyvoo of the trains at Council Grove."

De Rastignac reflected upon this information for several moments while they plodded along, hopping across the numerous mud-holes. Weaver had noted, with some amusement, the Southerner's tendency to ponder any new idea which was presented to him; it was a whimsical contradiction of his usual disposition.

"I am of the opinion that Colonel Owens is entirely justified in the practise you describe, Jud," he said at last. "It is true that a man who gambles cannot be depended upon to the extent of one who does not."

"You wouldn't let anybody else say so," remarked Weaver, smiling.

"It would depend upon the motive of the person who said it," answered de Rastignac seriously.



OTHER men had preceded them from the steamer, so it was an hour or more before they were admitted into the mud-plastered, log-walled room in which Colonel Owens transacted his business. The freighter was a large, stout man, ruddy-faced and cordial, whose rotund voice was a manifestation of the big heart which animated his every purpose. He dealt Jud Timmons a bone-cracking slap on the back, and received Weaver and de Rastignac with a friendliness that was almost embarrassing.

"A Yankee and a planter, eh? B'gad, you ought to make a good team. That's the spirit, boys! This is a big job we've got out here. The country don't realize it. Some day I wouldn't wonder but there'll be towns all along this way, and what with the Mexican trade and the fur business— Well, this ain't helping your problems any, me talking about a hundred years from now, eh? Fact is, though, we need the right kind of young fellers, especially in the Santa Fé trade, and it makes me plumb tickled to see a pair like you breezin' in.

"You ain't goin' to find it easy. Don't you misunderstand me. Damn few make more'n a hard livin' on the plains or in the mountains, either. But it can be done, and the time's comin' the pickin' will be better. Now, what can I do for you?"

He read St. Vrain's letter with gusto, took a pencil from his desk and began to scribble on the margin.

"St. Vrain says you're a friend of Kit Carson's. Says, too, you're short of money, wants me to credit your outfit. You look like the kind of feller to trust, Mr. Weaver. I'll chance you. Now, will you take my advice on what you need or have you got your own ideas?"

"I haven't any ideas at all, Colonel," answered Weaver.

"Good! Ignorant fellers learn; know-alls die the first time they get into a water-scrape."

"A what?" asked Weaver.

"A water-scrape. Jud, there, will tell you the things to fear on the prairies are Injuns, water-scrapes—long *jornadas* without water-holes—and ornery pardners. Hey, Jud?"

"Bible-words, them are," asserted Jud.

"Bible-words is right," agreed Owens, chuckling. "Come straight out of the frontier Bible, leastways. Well, now, for your needin's. You'll need one wagon, reg'lar trade body; that'll cost you one hundred dollars. For teams some fellers use mules, but they come high, and for a young feller just startin' I'd recommend oxen. They'll cost you twenty-eight dollars a yoke. Four yoke will do you, although many folks take six. Food and other necessaries will come to around one hundred dollars, so all in all, you'll be owin' me somethin' more'n three hundred dollars. Satisfactory?"

"I haven't any fault to find with it," said Weaver warmly. "I'm very grateful to you."

"Oh, I'll be making on you in the long run. Now, Mr. de Rastignac, how about you?"

"As I am Mr. Weaver's partner, Colonel Owens, I shall require the same equipment which he does," answered the Southerner, "with the addition, however, that I must also purchase a freight of stores for my wagon."

Owens squinted at him.

"Oh-ho! Didn't bring your goods out with you, eh?"

"No, sir. I only decided to make the

Santa Fé trip after boarding the steamer from St. Louis."

"Ah, you're the young feller they were tellin' me about an hour ago. You cleaned up the bar the first night on the river."

De Rastignac's back stiffened.

"If you refer to my gambling——"

"I sure do, young feller! And I'm sorry, but you don't get credit from me."

De Rastignac's face turned crimson.

"Have I asked for credit?" he asked, very low.

"No, but——"

"Then, sir, perhaps you will be kind enough to keep your observations to yourself! I am not accustomed to insults from persons with whom I desire only to transact business on a cash basis."

Colonel Owens' face had settled into a mask during this speech.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "you're on the frontier, Mr. de Rastignac. Out here all of us tote shootin'-irons, and all of us use 'em. I didn't insult you. I told you how I did business, after you said you wanted to do business with me. If you don't like my——"

Harvey interposed quickly.

"You've both misunderstood each other. De Rastignac turned over to me the money he won on the *Prairie Belle*, Colonel. He played because he was flat broke, and it was the only way he could get enough money to throw in with me. When he had won it, he quit."

"And I don't want credit," cut in the Southerner. "I believe I have sufficient funds to pay on the nail for what I require."

"You have, Henri," Weaver reassured him, and he dug the wad of bills and swollen purse out of his own pocket.

"There's one thousand five hundred and twenty-five dollars," said the New Yorker. "Can you sell him a wagonload of goods, with oxen and provisions for that, Colonel?"

Owens chuckled again.

"I sure can. You and I seem to be hair-trigger varmints, Mr. de Rastignac. No offense intended in anything I said, and I hope you feel the same way."

De Rastignac bowed in the fashion that Weaver thought somewhat theatrical.

"Your explanation is quite satisfactory, Colonel. It is my misfortune to have merited the condemnation of my kinfolk for gambling in the past, and I am, in consequence, inclined to be touchy on that point. I may add, sir, that I should be the last to object to any man who refused credit to one in my position—just as I should never think of imposing upon you or anyone else for credit in my present circumstances."

A twinkle glimmered faintly in Colonel Owens' eyes.

"We understand each other, after all. That's fine! And I'll tell you what I'll do. I don't reckon on outfitting traders here as completely as you want, but I'm sending my nephew, 'K.' Harrison, along with this summer's train, and I'll sell you one of his wagons, load, grease-pot, bull-whip and all. That do?"

"If I have the money to pay—" de Rastignac started to say.

Owens stripped one hundred dollars in bills from the roll Weaver had placed on his desk.

"You keep this," said the freighter. "Your gold is worth a premium, so we'll call it square at fourteen and a quarter. I can't guarantee to give you a wagon-load identical with your pardner's in contents, but it'll be standard trade-goods of fair worth and quantity."

"I am entirely satisfied, sir."

"That's two of you settled," commented Owens. "What about you, Jud?"

"Wa'al, Colonel," drawled the trapper, "all I'm figurin' on is gittin' me back to Touse (Taos) along with the train. Mebbe you could credit me a pony and a pack-mule and some fixin's to go with 'em."

"I'll have 'em ready for you tomorrow." Owens swung around upon the two young men. "You come with me, now, and we'll find Weaver's wagon and choose his oxen. Then you'd better go down to the landing and load up, get your stuff under cover. Tomorrow pull out for Fitzhugh Prairie. The train rendezvous will be Council Grove, as perhaps you've been told. Since you are both new to the job, it would be most sensible if you went on there at once, taking it easy and learning how to handle your oxen. Am I right, Jud?"

"Bible-words," repeated the trapper solemnly. "But thisyere Yankee is a kind of pet of mine, Colonel. I never knowed one of his breed before, and I'm sorter aimin' to trail along with him and his pardner. 'Twon't hurt 'em none to have an old horned toad like me to tell 'em whenever the rattlers rattle."

"I'd say they were damned lucky," approved Owens.

Weaver sank his fingers deep in Jud's arm.

"Do you honestly mean that?" he demanded.

"I'll have to be shooken off," declared Jud.

De Rastignac flashed his white teeth in a rare smile.

"Maybe you'll trail me now and then, Jud?" he suggested.

"Shore will," declared Jud heartily. "A Yankee, a Southron and a mountain man—that's a three-card combination you cain't beat."

VI

TWELVE days on the trail between Owens Landing and Council Grove turned Weaver and de Rastignac into a pair of sunburned, bearded, sore-handed teamsters. Their feet were chafed from the unaccustomed tramping in heavy cowhide boots. Their bodies were racked by the fatigue of the daily round of duties. Their voices were hoarse from the frequence with which they "geed" and "hawed" their oxen, which knew them for ignorant, and in a bland, bovine fashion endeavored continually to take advantage of them. Their eyes ached from the sun-glare and the dust-clouds. Their backs were lame from the labors of hewing wood and drawing water, pulling and pushing the clumsy wagons. They nicked chunks of flesh out of their forearms in experiments with the savage bullwhips.

But day by day the tasks that had seemed insuperable in the beginning became easier of achievement. The knife and revolvers that swung at their hips were no longer objects of constant concern. Their muscles hardened, and under Jud's patient tuition they learned to kindle a fire with a handful of buffalo-chips in a strong wind, to make slapjacks and saleratus bread, to tell direction at night, to snake the plodding teams over creek-bottoms and marsh-traps, to throw up a shelter of brush against the wheel-rims, to swing the wood-ax with an economy of effort, to hug a convenient shadow when they mounted herd-guard after dark—and, most important of all, to extract the last possible ounce of energy out of the slow-moving oxen.

"Fifteen mile a day, week in, week out, that's the Trail pace," said Jud. "You mind that, young fellers. It don't mean fifteen today and fifteen tomorrow. If you figgered thataway 'twould most likely be fifteen today, and mebbe twelve or ten the next day—'cause there's allus what you didn't expect jest ahead of you. Yes, sirree, fifteen mile a day means goadin' these durned critters for all they're wuth, twenty mile when you kin git it; twenty-five mile even, if the road's good. Then you even up when yore luck breaks bad."

They didn't average fifteen miles a day at first, or anything like it, but the average improved steadily, and by the second week of their trail experiences they were close to satisfying Jud. Secretly, the trapper was hugely amused by the difference with which his two protegés went at the problems of their new life.

To Weaver the idea of working with his hands was perfectly natural, something to be done without any feeling of distaste. The New Yorker really came to enjoy the satisfaction of developing physical ingenuity; he liked to chop wood, to struggle with a fire, to cook food, with Jud close by to avert catastrophe to the meal. But he had almost no knowledge of firearms and the use of them; his initial attempts against prairie wolves and a stray deer were laughable, while days were required to teach him the self-confidence essential to the handling of the tricky Colt revolvers.

On the other hand, de Rastignac naturally loathed working with his hands; he flushed the first time Jud called to him to fetch a pail of water from the spring by which they had camped; he was uncomfortable at all the manual tasks which required attention morning and evening. Not that he refused to do his share, but, rather, that he did it with a stern determination which was comical. Unlike Weaver, however, he was an excellent shot, with either rifle or hand-gun, and he also adapted himself much more readily to the exigencies of camp life than the New Yorker.

Yet in the long run each rounded out his deficiencies, and each was contentiously insistent that the division of labor should be equal. If de Rastignac produced the most game for the pot, Weaver insisted on cooking it. If Weaver built the night's shelter, de Rastignac must carry water, kindle the fire and see the beasts bedded down. Jud stood back and let them fight it out, with an occasional shrewd hint when the debate waxed heated.

"Shore is a scrumpshus life for me," he would remark. "Never did see two greenhorns more set on doin' ever'thing to be did in a camp. Allus goin' to hitch onto greenhorns after this. I been a durned fool to do my own work all these years."

They were the first units of the summer train to arrive at Council Grove, and found

comfortable quarters in one of a number of bark lodges which had been left by a band of Kaws, who were off on a buffalo-hunt. On Jud's recommendation, they occupied themselves for two days in cutting carefully-selected balks of timber to be slung beneath their wagons for use in repairing damages on the Trail.

"From here on you don't git no more hardwood," he informed them. "And the prairies is awful wearin' on wagons. The heat dries the frames, and the rough spots rip 'em apart."

IN THE meantime several parties came in from Independence, and after the third day wagons rolled in by twos and threes as well as singly. The smaller outfits almost all had ox teams, some of three yokes, some of four. On the sixth day, with a crackling of bullwhips that sounded like musketry fire and a large amount of whooping and yelling, K. Harrison, Colonel Owens' nephew, rode into the Grove at the head of ten spick-and-span wagons, each drawn by five pairs of mules, and with two men to a wagon.

Weaver was standing with Jud and de Rastignac beside the trail to watch the spectacle, and Harrison edged his horse over to them as soon as he had indicated to his men where he wished the wagons parked.

"Yore name's Weaver, ain't it?" he called. "The colonel said you'd oughter be with Jud Timmons."

"That's right," answered Weaver, wondering why he was singled out.

"I got a talk for you from Kit Carson," explained Harrison, dismounting.

He was a raw-boned, beak-nosed man, with the same cordial manner as his uncle, and, likewise, the same keen, direct glance. A man Weaver sized up to be capable of holding his own in the give-and-take of the frontier.

"Kit, he figgered on joining up with the train, but he met an army officer comin' up the river, feller name of Fremont, goin' on a Gov'ment trip out to the mountains; wants to see what the South Pass looks like. Anyways, Fremont asked Kit to guide him, and Kit's a-goin' to. He says to tell you, Kit does, that he'll most likely swing around south from the head of the Platte along late in the summer and get down to Touse some time in October."

Harrison hesitated, and looked over his shoulder.

"He wants for you to keep away from Señor Ramon, Weaver," he then continued with lowered voice. "Says there's bad medicine for you wherever Cust hangs out. Watch yore step, he says. The colonel told him Jud was with you, and he said—" a humorous glint relieved the agate hardness of the freighter's eyes—" to keep Jud away from Cust's liquor, and mind his advice."

Jud swore with lusty precision.

"Not that I kin find fault with Kit," he wound up, "seein' as I sorter fell from grace, as the parsons say, in St. Louis; but Kit oughter have knowed I ain't the kind to trail a coyote like Señor Ramon."

"I'm a-tellin' you what Kit said," rejoined Harrison impassively.

"Is Cust going with this train?" asked Weaver.

A shadow clouded Harrison's face.

"Yes—damn him! Got to wait till tomorrow afore he comes up, too."

Jud interposed.

"How many wagons is he fotchin', K.?"

"Fifteen. Twenty-five men."

The trapper surveyed the busy scenes surrounding them in the Grove.

"Huh," he ruminated. "You got ten wagons—and twenty men?"

"Twenty-one, countin' myself."

"Huh! And thar's fifteen wagons in t'other outfits here, and twenty-four men, countin' some loose-ends like me. Wa'al, K., we'd oughter be stronger'n Señor Ramon."

Harrison gave the trapper a significant look.

"You know most of the fellers," he said. "Feel around tonight, and git their idea on the 'lection."

With which remark he rode off to supervise the corraling of his mules.

"What does he mean by talking about an election?" inquired de Rastignac. "Do politics follow us out here into the wilds, Jud?"

Jud grinned amicably.

"Shore do, Henry. Bible-words, boy, Bible-words! You see, a train like this has got to have a leetle gov'ment of its own, ain't it? It's like a reg'lar young army. End of the fust day out we hold a meetin', and 'lect a cap'n, and the cap'n he reg-lates ever'thing; app'ints the sergeants of the guard, four of 'em, who draw lots for the rest of us. Each sergeant's guard watches a night, and if thar's an Injun

fight, why each guard takes a side of the camp. See?"

De Rastignac nodded. "And you are concerned for fear that this man Cust might be elected captain?"

"Yes, sirree."

The Southerner dropped a hand on the butt of one of his revolvers; he wore a six-shooter strapped on either hip, like Weaver, and also carried his derringers stowed one to a pocket.

"It seems to me, as I remarked before to Harvey," he observed, "that the shortest way out of the unpleasantness Cust seems to create would be for me to force a quarrel on him. Why should we allow him to——"

"Ain't I explained it all to you how the Mexicans feel for him?" demanded Jud. "If we did him in thataway, good-by to the trade! You keep yore hands off them guns, you wildcat."

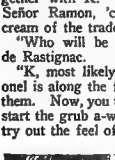
Weaver had a sinking sensation.

"If Cust is to be captain of the train, I might as well give up any thought of going," he said. "He would be certain to make trouble for me."

"Don't you git scairt ahead of time," advised Jud. "I'd gamble a bale of beaver the leetle outfits like ours will hang together with K. They're all jealous of Señor Ramon, 'count of his gittin' the cream of the trade."

"Who will be elected captain?" asked de Rastignac.

"K, most likely. When he or the colonel is along the fellers gen'rally picks on them. Now, you two git back to camp and start the grub a-warmin', and I'll begin to try out the feel of things."



DUSK had settled over the Grove when Jud showed himself at the door of the lodge.

"Señor Ramon ain't got no more chance in this train'n a coyote in a wolf pack," he announced. "Shore, it's jest like I thought. 'Why cain't we start tomorrow?' asks old Contraband Gentry. ''Cause Señor Ramon won't be ready,' says I. 'Durn him anyway,' says Contraband. 'Didn't he spoil my tobacco-smugglin'? And now he holds us all up.' So you kin count Gentry ag'in him.

"Same way with Gene Leitensdorfer and his brother Tom. 'Got to wait for Cust ag'in?' says they. 'You might think he was the hull train!' 'How you votin', boys?' I asks 'em. 'For anybody but that yaller cur,' says they. And so on down through the camp. Señor Ramon'll git twenty-five votes, countin' his own—and that's all. How's that air pa'atridge soup comin' on, Harv?"

And the issue fell out substantially as Jud predicted. Cust led his wagons into the Grove early the following afternoon, hand on hip, contemptuous gaze sweeping the small-fry traders who scowled at his motley array of followers, the least of whom were better—or more gaudily—dressed than the independents; at his brand new wagons and picked mule-teams. That night there was a fight between one of Cust's breeds and a free trader, which was only stopped short of bloodshed by Harrison's liberal use of his bullwhip. Cust was disposed to accuse Harrison of partiality with the lash, and Harrison snapped him up short.

"I'm willin' the camp should decide," said K. "There ain't a cap'n yet. That suit you?"

Cust swallowed his wrath by an effort. He was no fool, and he knew already how he stood.

"That would be useless," he said haughtily. "But if my men are abused I'll make it interesting for those responsible when we reach Santa Fé."

"I don't doubt it, Señor Ramon," returned Harrison with a sarcastic grin. "But you want to remember you got to come back to the States."

The next day, the second of July, the train "catched up" and "drove out" for the first time as an organized whole, and the two greenhorns from New Orleans and New York were at last sure that they had squared their backs on civilization. Two by two the wagons wound across the prairie, the bushy tree-tops of the Grove standing up darkly green against the climbing sun, ahead only the rolling expanse of the short buffalo grass. In the lead went the mule-teams, harness clinking musically; behind, tramped the oxen, ponderous, rumps swaying in rhythm, lowing an occasional complaint. A few horsemen rode on the flanks. Rumble and bump! Rumble and bump! the great wagons rolled along, broad tires slashing deep ruts in the root-bound black soil, the hoofs of the draught-beasts stamping flat the grass that had sprouted since the trail was traced in the preceding fall.

"Is this Indian country?" de Rastignac called excitedly to Jud, who was riding between the partners' wagons.

"Shore," drawled the trapper, "you mought call it Injun country, but the Injuns hereaways ain't hostiles."

"When do we see buffalo?" cried Weaver.

"Most any time, Harv. Keep yore eye pealed 'n' if you see one holler. You kin count coup for yore fust buff'lo."

But they did not see buffalo that day or for many days to come. Except for the wolves which followed the train for the scraps of food left at each camping-place and the prairie-dogs whose villages rimmed the Trail, the country seemed barren of life, desolate with an emptiness that struck new-comers almost with physical impact. It was so illimitably vast, so austere, with its billows of grass from horizon to horizon, its clumps of cottonwoods where creek or spring provided an occasional water-supply. And the spell of the prairies established a bond between the factions of the train, which went far to smooth over the resentments stirred up by the election.

This, in itself, was a tame affair. The company gathered around a central fire after the evening meal at the first camp, and old Nick Gentry—Contraband, as Jud called him—a famous character of the Santa Fé trade, as the senior trader in point of experience, announced that nominations for captain should be made. Gene Leitensdorfer instantly called out Harrison's name, and one of Cust's men retaliated by shouting: "Raymond Cust, of Santey Fee!"

"Anybody else?" asked Gentry.

Nobody spoke, and he continued, "Them as votes for Cust stand to the right. Harrison men to the left."

The division practically was the line of Cust's company; he gained only three outside votes: one small trader, who probably hoped to secure better terms at the Mexican custom house by bootlicking the governor's agent, and two mountain men, who, like Jud Timmons, were traveling with the train for protection.

"All them fellers want is Señor Ramon's word to the gov'nor when they go for trappin' licenses," growled Jud as he identified them in the smaller group.

Harrison was declared captain, and he proceeded to name his sergeants of the guard, practising a policy of conciliation in choosing Cust as the first. Of the remaining three one was Jud, and the trapper happened to pick de Rastignac's name from the heap of slips in Harrison's slouch-hat. But Weaver was read out as falling to Cust's watch, and although his enemy's face revealed no trace of exultation as the New Yorker took his place behind the first sergeant, this did not make Weaver any easier in his mind.

"I suppose he'll haze me every chance he gets," he said unhappily when he was alone with his two friends. "He didn't notice me at all, but I thought I saw a light in his eye that—well, that——"

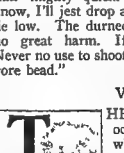
"My dear Harvey," de Rastignac interrupted impetuously, "if the scoundrel so much as lays a finger on you——"

"Sorghum and ditchwater!" grunted Jud. "If Señor Ramon acts up 'twon't be thataway."

"What way will he take, then?" inquired Harvey anxiously.

"Now, if I knowed, Harv, I'd do somethin' mighty quick. But, seein' I don't know, I'll jest drop a word in K's ear and lie low. The durned snake cain't do you no great harm. If he tries to—huh! Never no use to shoot 'till you done drawed yore bead."

VII



THE train's first mishap occurred at Mud Creek, where the approaches were so badly mired that it was necessary for all hands to spend half a day cutting buffalo-grass with which to make a roadbed. A day's march westward, as the foremost wagons were toping a swale in the prairie, Jud Timmons emitted a startling whoop.

"Buff'ler over thar!"

De Rastignac had sighted them at almost the same moment: a cow and a bull trotting out of a clump of brushwood two hundred yards away.

"I'll try a shot," he exclaimed, and snatched his rifle from its sling on the wagon's side.

Weaver, who had been tramping on the far side of the wagon, ran around as Jud whooped.

"Wait, Henri," he called. "I'll go, too."

Jud had started to knee his pony to a gallop, but he reined back, with a grin.

"All right," he said. "You greenhorns see what you can make of it. Look sharp! T'other fellers is wakin' up."

Indeed, by this time, the cry was running the length of the train—"Buffalo!" "Buffalo in sight!" "Where?" "Who saw 'em?"

But Weaver and de Rastignac did not wait for any assistance. They ran up the depression after the lumbering beasts, which had commenced to climb the western slope, ignoring the train and their pursuers; probably because what little wind there was blew into their muzzles. On the crest of the rise the creatures hesitated in front of a patch of succulent grass, and Weaver and de Rastignac redoubled their pace.

"Get—too much—out—of breath—can't shoot," panted Weaver.

"True," admitted the Southerner. "Guess we—can make it, now."

He halted, and Weaver followed his example.

"Better shoot," advised the New Yorker, peering over his shoulder at the stream of men who were following them, all with guns poised.

De Rastignac flung himself prone.

"I'll take the right one," he said. "You can have the left."

He fired while Weaver was still aiming, and the cow dropped. The bull turned at the report, regarded its mate amazedly and then fronted its attackers with matted head lowered and eyes glaring.

"You couldn't have a better shot, Harv," cried the Southerner, leaping to his feet. "Drop him."

A cheer from the train applauded de Rastignac's success. It was just enough to spoil Weaver's aim; his bullet flicked the dust at the buffalo's hoofs, and in a second the bull was lunging away over the crest and out of reach of other rifles.

Harvey rose, flushed with humiliation, as twenty men gathered around the pair of greenhorns.

"That air wore a good shot, Henry," said Jud, who was one of the leaders. "How come you missed, Harv?"

"I—I——"

"I think a grasshopper jumped in his face," spoke up de Rastignac. "It was a long shot; I only made it by luck."

"There wasn't any grasshopper," denied Weaver. "I'm a rotten shot, that's all."

"Wa'al, them as knows their faults is allus cureable," commented Jud.

And laughter echoed the words. Cust, coming up leisurely on his blooded Mexican stallion, overheard it.

"Who killed that buffalo?" he inquired of one of his own men.

"Rasteenack," returned the other. "The Yankee missed his'n clean."

Cust kept his eyes averted from the two greenhorns, but his contemptuous answer cut Weaver like a whiplash.

"I never saw the Yankee yet could shoot for beans. They haven't got the guts."

De Rastignac opened his mouth to reply, but Weaver caught his friend by the arm.

"Easy, Hen," he murmured. "No use picking a quarrel over this. He wasn't speaking to us."

"Yes, but he meant you to hear," retorted the Southerner.

"What if he did? I deserved what he said, after all. Any man 'with guts' would never have missed that bull."

Jud, dismounting from his pony beside them, wagged his head forebodingly.

"Fust buff'lo allus means a fight. Never knowed it to fail. But you done right, Harv, to keep yore mouth shet. Wait till you git a second chance and then show what you kin do. Come on now, boys, we got to cut up that critter."

To Weaver's considerable surprise Cust's was the one jibe to which he was treated. He hadn't endeavored to excuse his miss, and in the eyes of most frontiersmen that acquitted him of any more serious offense than the bare and unescapable one of being a greenhorn. Had he seized upon the sop to his pride which de Rastignac mistakenly had offered he would have become an object of derision for the remainder of the trip.

In fact, in accordance with prairie custom, de Rastignac, because of his success, was the butt of continual jokes; as a greenhorn, of course, he must be taught that one achievement did not acquit him of his inferiority. That very night while the men off-guard were feasting on buffalo steaks around the fires, K. Harrison stopped by the group of which de Rastignac was a member.

"I'm sorry, boys," he said soberly, "but I got to call for volunteers."

All the men within sound of the captain's voice crowded closer.

"Volunteers?" queried one. "What's wrong?"

"Are the Injuns—" a second started to ask.

"There's a man needs some fellers to sit up with him," pursued K.

The news spread to other fires, and more men ran up.

"Is he pretty bad?" "What's wrong?" "They say a man's took sick." "Yes, he's purty bad."

Old Nick Gentry, his bleary eyes twinkling, forced his way to the front of the ring. Maybe he knew what was up.

"Who is it, Cap?" he asked.

"Wa'al, this feller Rasteenack jest killed his fust buff'lo," explained K., as dolefully as though he had announced an epidemic of smallpox, "and I'm scairt he'll git beside himself, and keep the whole camp awake."

A bellow of laughter mounted to the stars. De Rastignac, torn betwixt resentment and amusement, bit his lip to keep from saying what he might regret.

K. regarded him sadly.

"Yes, sirree, boys," sighed the captain, "he's got to have somebody to talk to him all night, and keep his mind off'n the subject. He's broodin' over it."

Jud, observing de Rastignac's choler, moved to end the torment.

"I'll volunteer, Cap'n," said the trapper. "'Tain't often a greenhorn fotches in his fust buff'lo in one shot, and sich a prodigy oughter be watched keerful. You jest leave him to me. He ain't what you mought call homicideous, but he shore has got the gun-itch dretful."

K. grinned, and offered the Southerner his hand.

"Young feller," he said, "that was durn good shootin'. But mind you don't go to broodin' on it too long."

De Rastignac swallowed hard.

"I'll try not to, Captain," he said with an effort.

They shook hands, and old Contraband Nick yelled, "Three cheers for the Loosyaner buff'ler-slayer!"

The camp responded with a vim that took the sting out of the lesson.

VIII

THAT night Cust's guard were on watch, and the sergeant mustered them outside the circle of wagons before they separated to their posts.

"This is Indian country," he said curtly. "And where there's buffalo there's usually Indians. The Pawnees roam from here to the Arkansas, and they are riding loose this summer, so look out for your scalps. If you see anything wrong shoot quick."

Weaver was on the herd guard—the cavvy, the train called it—in company with Little Pete and several more men. The breed seemed much impressed by Cust's warning.

"Thees' Pawnee damn bad Injuns," he declared as he tramped with his companions to where the mules and oxen were grazing in a convenient glade. "Ride like hell, shoot like hell, fight like hell. Bad medicine!"

"Shore," agreed one of Cust's mountain men, "I don't never want to see their horns."

"They haven't horns!" exclaimed Weaver, who was as ignorant as most Easterners concerning the fierce Plains tribes.

The old-timers around him chuckled more or less good-humoredly.

"They got horns, don' you worree," asserted Little Pete. "One beeg horn, she stan' up from zee head."

"It's the way they fix their ha'ar," explained the mountain man. "Do it up stiff in a kind of horn, like I said. Never seed nothin' like it! Some of the Pueblo women do up their ha'ar like squash-blossoms, but they ain't a patch on them Pawnees for looks."

Weaver thrilled pleasantly. This was adventure.

"All beeg men," the breed picked up the conversation. "Such men! Lean and of a tallness! They have bows of buff'lo horn. Their arrows go t'rough you."

There were more reminiscences from those who had fought with the Pawnees, and the men separated to their posts. Weaver was stationed on the side farthest from the camp, and he crouched in the shadow of a low bush, which was the only shelter available. The nearest of the other herd-guards was scarcely within earshot of him. Low in his mind from the poor showing he had made that afternoon, the New Yorker was conscious of a spiritual loneliness he had never experienced before during the train's journey. De Rastignac, he told himself, was earning men's respect while he was blundering along, as much a greenhorn as the day he left Owens Landing. Any man with sand must have shot that buffalo. It was no wonder Cust had mocked him.

Presently he realized that his introspection had been withholding his attention from his duties, and he resolutely squared his back on such thoughts, pleasant or unpleasant, setting himself to keep vigilant watch on the sea of darkness that surrounded him. Behind him he heard the movements of the herd, the grunts of the oxen, a mule's squeal, hoofs thudding in the grass. None of his charges was actually visible. They were a vague, shifting mass of shadows, appearing and disappearing. The camp, with its parked wagons, was a ruddy blurr: the glow of the cooking-fires above the wagon-tops. The

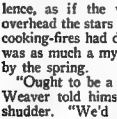
spring, which was the excuse for the camping-ground, was a darker blurr to the right: the branches of the cottonwoods that sprang from the dank soil.

"I can't really see those trees," he reflected. "I know they're there because I noticed 'em while it was light—and now I just think I see them. That shows how easy it is to imagine things in the dark."

Several hours went by, and by the rude star-lore Jud had taught him Weaver estimated the hour to be close to midnight. A night-wind was ruffling the grass-tops, and the air had turned chilly. He shivered as he crouched; his joints were stiff and lame; his gun-barrel was dewed with moisture, the stock clammy to the touch.

The herd had become quieter. Sometimes there would be a period of utter silence, as if the world stood still. And overhead the stars were more remote. The cooking-fires had died down, and the camp was as much a mystery as the tree-growth by the spring.

"Ought to be a good hour for Injuns," Weaver told himself with an involuntary shudder. "We'd never——"



HE CHECKED himself as he heard something. What it was he did not know, but there had been a rustling of the grass off to the right and in front of him, a rustling sound different from the even, monotonous rustle which the wind stirred.

Weaver rose to his knees, and clutched his rifle tighter. What could it be? One of the other herd-guards seeking a moment's talk to relieve the loneliness they all doubtless experienced? He was tempted to call out, but thought better of it. No, that was not the part of caution. Hold steady, and wait until he could see, that was the thing to do. His heart beat agitatedly. Perhaps he might be able to prove himself.

The rustling was nearer. A figure rose above the skyline. A horse! And on its back an inhuman shape, a form of menace, topped by a great, curving horn of stiffened hair.

Weaver scrambled to his feet and raised his rifle. Simultaneously, the figure slid from view. The gun exploded, and a mule's panic-squeal was shrill in the night. Men's voices were raised in challenge.

"Indians!" quavered Weaver.

The cry was taken up.

"In with the cavvy," shouted Harrison's voice. "You durned fools, d'you want to give the redskins a extry chance?"

"Yip-yip!" It was Jud yelping. "Round up them oxen, thar. Hol' stiddy, you jacks. Race 'em, boys, race 'em. Arrows any minute. Come on, come on! Whar you at, Harv?"

Weaver, panting faster than when he had pursued the buffalo, bolted into the midst of the cavvy.

"I'm all right," he gasped. "It's Pawnees, Jud. I saw one, myself—on his horse."

Jud paused and shouted to Harrison across the milling backs of the brutes they shepherded.

"Here's Weaver says he seed a Pawnee, K."

"Shucks," roared Harrison's answer. "Pawnees would have been up to the wagons by this. Why, we're gonner git the herd in."

Jud stooped over the tenderfoot.

"You shore, boy? How did you know 'twere a Pawnee?"

"By his hair, the horn!"

Jud whistled faintly.

"So-ho! Somebody else a-larnin' you, eh?"

"Little Pete was telling me about them, when we went out on guard, and others, too. You see, Cust had warned us we were in the Pawnee country."

The trapper squinted at the implacable mystery of the shadow-bound prairie.

"Huh! Mebbe so. But I never knowed Pawnees to raid the trains this side of Pawnee Rock. Wa'al, time'll tell. But jest as K. says, any Pawnee band that amounted to anythin' would have run off the cavvy four shakes ago—and lifted yore ha'ar."

"But I shot at one of them," insisted Weaver.

"Don't be too brash about tellin' that around," advised Jud.

He reined aside to urge the stream of animals, mules and oxen inextricably mixed, through the gap which had been left on purpose in the line of wagons on the side of the camp facing the herd ground.

"Guards that raise a false-alarm at night ain't what you might call pop'lar, Harv."

"But I saw——"

"Mebbe you did, mebbe you did. But you be guided by me. Keep a still tongue in yore head. 'Nless that wore a lone Injun, which ain't nach-ral, his *compadres*

would— Wait till we got the camp redded up and the men 'counted for."

Harvey clamped his teeth on a growing conviction that he was being treated unfairly. He had done his duty—and what was his reward? To be covertly laughed at. De Rastignac was on the east side of the camp, out of touch, so he had nobody with whom he could exchange confidences. Cust, passing by, ordered him sharply to a firing position beneath a wagon. Gradually order was being reestablished; the animals were under shelter; men to right and left of him were exchanging low-voiced comments— "See anything?" "It's a greenhorn's nightmare!" "What's that yon, Baptiste?" "You have zee drream, too."

Interminable hours went by, and the east began to whiten. Weaver felt sick at heart, for the dim prairies showed no sign of life, and it was obvious, even to him, that Indians would have attacked while they had the darkness to cover them. He was in a very downcast mood when Jud called him from his post, and the trapper was not inclined to joviality.

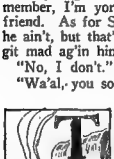
"You come with me, Harv," was Jud's command. "K.'s investigatin' things, and he wants to know jest what you think——"

"See here," said the New Yorker grimly. "I saw what I said I saw. I'm inclined to be quarrelsome with anyone who——"

"Shore, shore," soothed Jud. "All of us has been thar, Harv. Now, you take advice from me. Bible-words, boy. Don't you go to losin' yore temper. Remember, I'm yore friend, and K.'s yore friend. As for Señor Ramon, we'll agree he ain't, but that's the best reason not to git mad ag'in him. See?"

"No, I don't."

"Wa'al, you soon will."



THE captain of the train was sitting with his sergeants by a fresh-kindled fire, and the looks on the faces of all five were the looks of tired men who had lost a night's sleep. Yet Harrison spoke kindly when he addressed the greenhorn.

"I hear you raised the alarm, Weaver," he said. "As you see, nothin's happened, but the herd-guards tell me one of my Mizzoura mules is barked in the hindquarter."

"I fired at an Indian on horseback," returned Weaver slowly. "An Indian with a Pawnee headdress."

"Sure it wasn't a mule?" questioned Cust, sneering.

"It was one of your men, Cust, who described to me what a Pawnee looked like," Weaver answered with self-control.

"Oh, you aren't the first greenhorn to fire at a mule, and claim it was a war-party—or to miss a buffalo at point-blank range."

Cust rose and stretched himself.

"Go on with this farce, if you want to, Harrison," he snapped. "But I'm going to get a wink of sleep before we catch up for the day. It's a damn shame that a fool greenhorn should be able to upset the whole train."

"Who says he did?" inquired Jud.

"I do," retorted Cust. "So does anybody else with sense. The man knows nothing about frontier life. He's unable to see to aim in the daylight, as he proved yesterday. He's exactly the sort who wake up their comrades with false alarms."

Weaver opened his mouth, then shut it again. His sense of justice told him he was in the wrong, although he was right in his contention. He had seen what he took to be an Indian, but an Indian band would have attacked before dawn, and, almost certainly, right on the heels of his discovery of one of their warriors.

"Captain," he exclaimed desperately, regardless of the haughty back Cust had turned to him, "I know you think I'm a fool, and I can't get around it that one of your mules was shot; but maybe one Indian was trying to cut out some of the——"

"'Tain't likely," Harrison thrust in abruptly. "All right, you men," this to the sergeants, "you kin go. Git yore sections cotched up on reg'lar time. I don't aim to lose an hour. Matter of fact, it done us all good to find out how we'd work if the Injuns jumped us."

He waited until only Jud and Weaver remained with him.

"Wa'al, Jud?" he asked mildly. "You have somethin' more to say?"

"I have," said Jud. "Remember, Rasteenack killed a buff'lo yesterday? I pinned the hide to the wagon to dry. Jest now I discovered the tail wore gone."

Harrison looked puzzled.

"Sho', Jud! I got more to think of than lost buff'lo tails in this camp. Git on, and leave me talk to this young feller."

"That's jest what I won't do," growled Jud. "Ever figure a man might make a

Pawnee hair-horn outen a buff'lo tail?"

The train captain stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Mebbe so, mebbe so! I mind Kit said Señor Ramon was after Weaver. Still, Jud, 'tain't much to play a joke like that on him."

"It's goin' far to make him the joke of the train," asserted the trapper, "comin' like it does, after he missed the buff'lo. Two mistakes together are hard to carry, 'specially when one wakes the men up."

"I can't believe it," said Harrison. "You think so?"

He flung the question sharply at Weaver.

"It never entered my head," protested the New Yorker.

"Señor Ramon give the boy a talk they was in the Pawnee country afore they went out last night," proceeded Jud. "And you know as well as me, K., this may be Pawnee country but the Pawnees 'most never raid trains this side of the Rock."

Harrison nodded.

"And what's more'n that," Jud added. "Little Pete follered up Señor Ramon with a talk of what the Pawnees looked like. It wore enough to make him see spooks!"

"That Little Pete would try any deviltry," agreed Harrison sagely.

"But I—or you—can't prove anything like that," cried Weaver.

"No, sirree," Harrison agreed again. "We shore cain't, and I don't aim to bust up the train with any ruckus over the hazin' of a greenhorn, not yet, I don't. Tell you what, though. I'll git you off easy with the men, not so much for what Jud says as because you didn't fly off yore handle at Cust when he acted uppity. That wore sensible, boy, and you count coup for it. Now, git on with you, and don't take this to heart. If you did make a mistake, I'd rather have two false alarms than one raid on the cavvy."

"Thank you," mumbled Weaver dumbly.

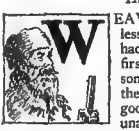
He felt more miserable than ever as he walked away beside Jud. The trapper understood this, and tried to encourage him.

"Whatever you do, Harv, don't git to lose yore temper. The fellers'll raise Ned with you, today most of all when they're tired and sleepy; but purty soon they'll have other things to think of. By Jude, I'm plumb glad 'twas you and not Rasteenack got in this pickle. He'd be shootin' off his handguns at half the train!"

"I'd be better thought of if I did perhaps," scowled the Northerner.

"Not you," said Jud cheerfully. "You ain't that breed of critter. You walk straight, and mind yore chin don't swing too high. Stick to yore story—and when they go to poke fun at you, why, you kin say K. and I was more'n half inclined to agree with you. That'll shet up most of 'em. And, for Gawd's sake, hol' still with Cust. You won't never do no tradin' in Santey Fee if he gits an excuse to work ag'in you."

IX



WEAVER escaped with less tormenting than he had anticipated. The first day everyone had something to say, but the gibes were usually good-natured, and his unassuming attitude and dogged insistence that he had seen what he reported won him considerable sympathy. And those, who, as in the case of Cust's men, were inclined to overstep the mark, were warned off by de Rastignac's peppery defense of his friend and the more subtle restraint imposed by Harrison and Jud.

With de Rastignac resentment took the form of threatening physical violence to offenders, and several duels were narrowly avoided; but the train captain and the trapper exercised their championship under cover. Thanks to them, within twenty-four hours the tale was spread through the camp that the New Yorker had been tricked by a parcel of hazers.

"Shore, he seed a Pawnee," said Jud to a group of independent traders. "But 'twere a white man with a Pawnee hair-horn atop of K.'s mule. Don't git after the greenhorn. He done his duty. The men for you to be sore at are the white-livered dogs that would rouse us all up jest for the sake of hazin' one Yankee."

No questions were asked or answered concerning the identity of the hazers, but the division between Cust's following and the rest of the train was emphasized anew. Then, luckily for the sake of all, they had their minds diverted from the "Mule Battle" as some wag christened the false-alarm, by the swelling numbers of the buffalo, which afforded opportunities for daily hunts. So dense became the herds streaming north that twice the train must pause in its progress to permit the passage of immense columns of beasts, and the prairie for miles was beaten into a sandy waste by their hoofs, with the consequence that clouds of dust were drawn into the air

and added another to the miseries of the march. Buffalo-meat became a commonplace dish; even the greenhorns wearied of it, and the talk was all of antelope.

At Pawnee Rock the outfit halted for a day's rest and all inspected the crude, colorful messages that Indian parties had daubed on the bare surface of the forty-foot promontory which bulked high above the prairie's level. Then on to Walnut Creek, never out of sight of buffalo. Ash Creek was safely passed, and two days later the loaded wagons toiled up to the shelving banks of the Pawnee Fork of the Arkansas. The water was low, the banks were steep, and there was a drop of thirty feet on the eastern shore and a climb of forty feet across on the western shore. To the greenhorns it looked impossible to lower and raise the wagons without destroying them; but Harrison and the rest of the old-timers went about the job with painstaking cheeriness.

The hind wheels were locked fast and a yoke of oxen was hitched to each hind-axle, with twenty men to help the beasts, and with the men and the oxen holding back, the wagons were dropped successfully to the water's brink, the hauling teams bracing their rumps against the drop every inch of the way down. On the opposite side the system was reversed; double teams were hitched to each wagon, men walked behind with heavy timbers ready to block the wheels if there was any delay, and the ascent was made to an accompaniment of adjurations and assorted cuss-words.

Part of the train were put across the first day, but the next morning one of Harrison's wagons upset in the middle of the stream, and all hands were called upon to strip and jump in to save the contents. This was not difficult as the wagon was but half-submerged, but hauling the vehicle onto its wheels again was a job that required three hours and upset the entire day's program. While part of the train were unpacking the wet goods and spreading them on the bank to dry, the remainder were toiling at the wagon. It was mid-afternoon before the salvage was complete.

The leaders gathered on the eastern bank, tired and soaked; and drank huge gulps of whisky out of tin cups. Some were for continuing the work, but Harrison thoughtfully shook his head.

"Yes, I know we'll lose time," he said, "but I don't want to move most of the wagons over and leave jest a handful here on the east bank. 'Twould be invitin' the redskins to help theirselves to loot in our faces, you mought say."

"No Indians are goin' to jump a train this size, if they haven't tried it already," answered Cust.

"Don't you be too shore, Señor Ramon," said Jud. "And say, it's yore wagons are here on the east bank."

Cust blinked at this.

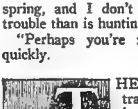
"But we've seen no Indian signs——"

"We've seen the buff'lo runnin' wild," broke in Jud, "and that means thar's Injuns somewhar abouts."

Harrison dropped his tin cup and picked up a shirt.

"We better let things stay thisaway," he said. "I heard from Kit Carson the Pawnees wore makin' war-medicine in the spring, and I don't aim to invite more trouble than is huntin' me."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Cust quickly.



THE rank-and-file of the train were delighted to have a rest for the balance of the day. Weaver and de Rastignac not less than the others. The two friends were obliged to remain with Cust because their wagons had not yet negotiated the crossing, and for the purposes of the night's camp the members of the four guards were shuffled around, so that men could stay with their own property. This shifted the Southerner out of his usual station, and enabled him to bunk with Weaver.

"I wish we might always be in the same guard," he exclaimed as they ate their meal of hardtack and buffalo, washed down with river-water. "But where's Jud?"

"He went across with Harrison to scout up the west bank," informed Weaver, who had seen the trapper off.

"No such luck as an Indian attack," grumbled the Southerner.

"I suppose not," Weaver assented. "I wonder if they'll put us on guard together?"

He was answered almost immediately by Cust, who shouted a summons for all the men in camp to line up for orders. When this had been done he divided them into two equal parties, placing Weaver in one and de Rastignac in the other.

"One half sleep, the other half watch," he announced. "We'll herd the cavvy between the wagons and the bank, and then

we'll need only two lines of sentries around it."

"If the reds jumped it they'd drive it over the bank, mebbe," suggested an old independent trader.

"If they get the jump on us we'll all lose our scalps," replied Cust indifferently, and he went to singling out the men of the first watch and posting them.

"Here, you greenhorn," he said sourly when he came to Weaver, "you're the man who was so watchful and tried to kill Harrison's mule. You seem to be good at cavvy-guard, so I'll put you on it again. You'll have the inland post down-stream."

Most of the men within hearing chuckled; Weaver gritted his teeth. He must not lose his temper. At least, while he was on post he was safe from Cust's hazing. And to tell the truth, he had come to welcome every chance at guard-duty as containing the possible germ of rehabilitation in his own self-respect.

"I've got to make good," he told himself over and over again, striding to his position in the sunset glow. "If I do, that cur——"

He forgot his hatred of Cust as he looked out over the busy scenes on both sides of the river. Across from him Harrison had parked the wagons on the west bank, and the cavvy with them was rounded up in a convenient grazing area, with the park on one side and a cottonwood grove shutting them off from the prairie. It was very still and he could hear faintly the voices of Harrison's men and smell the smoke of the campfires.

Then he turned his eyes in front, and, perceiving a knoll some rods from the bank, he walked over and climbed it. From this slight eminence he had a view of leagues of country tumbling eastward. It was country they had traversed, and it seemed familiar to him. No harm could come out of its lifeless expanse, tenanted only by the beasts. He stood entranced, his eyes fixed on the dim blue line where land and sky met. The sun, an orange ball, was poised a hand's breadth above the skyline in the west, its rays shooting level athwart the plains. And Weaver, gazing idly along that flood of vivid light, was suddenly disturbed by an odd reflection in the east. The light glimmered and danced, as if it shone in a mirror or on polished metal. A lance-head, perhaps? Some wandering buffalo-hunter's gun-barrel?

For a moment, he was inclined to run to the nearest guard and call attention to it, but when he looked again the reflection was gone. The rays were now deflected upward from a nearer point; the sun was already a third of its bulk below the horizon.

"Another false-alarm," he muttered. "No, I can't risk it. But this knoll is a good place to watch from. I'll stay here."

He lay down in a patch of long grass and made himself comfortable, and the minutes of the twilight stole away. The camp at his back became quiet; the air grew cooler; the river under the bank gurgled and chattered. It was very peaceful. He experienced a soothing inclination to sleep, but he resolutely kept his eyes open. The darkness deepened. Away off somewhere a wolf howled, and was answered. Silence again, and more wolves, nearer. They must be approaching the camp, lured by the scent of offal; the wind was blowing their way. But he was puzzled, after an hour or two had elapsed, that they were not prowling in close, as they had on previous nights.

His puzzlement increased when the wolves were answered apparently by a bird-call from the river bank. There was no mistaking it. That bird had not called all night. Why should it begin to call back to a wolf? Who ever heard of a bird answering a wolf?

Weaver was aware of a trickle of perspiration on the nape of his neck; his backhair was bristly. He felt with a clarity beyond words that something was happening out there in front of him. But he dared not cry an alarm. If he was wrong he'd have to leave the train. He argued the situation with himself, trying to master the terror of the unknown that made his fingers quiver, and his will insisted rigorously that there was but one course to take: he must crawl forward and endeavor to discover if there was a basis for what might be foolish apprehensions.

"Can't go for an Indian, and shoot another mule," he reasoned.

So he ironed out his fear, and commenced to wriggle cautiously down the slope of the knoll. His progress was slow, and he had not gone far when a shoeless hoof thudded on the ground toward the river. He dropped flat, and concentrated his gaze on a star that was a silver speck low in the western sky. A figure blotted the star, and Weaver shivered as he descried the monstrous horned headdress and caught the glint of the starshine on a lance-point. All around him, now, he heard the "shush-shush" of unshod pony-hoofs.

He squatted on his haunches and drew a careful bead on the figure in line with the star.

CRACK!. His rifle seemed to blast a hole in the night. He had a dazzled impression of scores of horned figures, crouched low on pony-back, of slanting lances, of bent bows, of brandished trade-muskets. A long ululation rose above the roar of his shot. Whoops replied to it, circled the camp, and there was a mad thunder of hoofs, racing unrestrained.

Weaver tugged at a revolver as an arrow whistled past his ear. Dark horned figures were all around him, a lance-point ripped an arm out of his coat, gashing the flesh; axes waved over his head. Then he began to shoot with the handgun, and his assailants wavered off. Other shots came from the cavvy-guards all the way to the river-bank. The wagon-park burst into song with a rumble and crack of weapons. The hoarse cheering of white men answered the shrill whooping of the Indians.

The New Yorker pulled his revolver's trigger a final time, and discovered the cartridges were exhausted; he tossed the weapon from him, and drew its mate. But there were no enemies at hand for him to resist. The main attack had swirled north along the flank of the park, where rifles were flashing and fire-arrows were curving upward in flaming arcs. To his right hand, toward the river, a small clump of savages were pounding back the herd-guards in an attempt to reach the cavvy. But it was a forlorn hope, for more and more men ran out from the park to reinforce the defense, and the river was aswarm with recruits from Harrison's camp.

The whooping lost its vigor; pony hoofs beat a receding tattoo; the fire-arrows faded out. Standing with legs astraddle, revolver in hand, Weaver was amazed that white men should be shouting and cursing within earshot—"Go easy, thar! They're treacherous devils." "Look out you don't get knifed from the ground, boys." "No pris-ners, men." "Slow up! Not too fur out—they may be layin' for us."

Then de Rastignac's voice, high-pitched, frantic: "Harvey! Harvey Weaver! Has anybody seen Weaver?"

"He was on guard with us," replied a man Weaver recalled to have left the camp with him.

"Shore," added another, "but he's a goner, all right. It wore him give the alarm."

Cust's voice, coldly sneering, overrode the others.

"He gave the alarm, eh? It got to be a habit with him."

Weaver experienced a peculiar surge of self-confidence. It was as if his greenhorn days were forgotten, a memory of the past.

"Hullo, Cust," he hailed coolly, "I'm here still. Weaver speaking. Come over, and I'll show you what a dead Pawnee looks like."

A pause.

"Hell!" snarled Cust. "I've got other things to do beside admiring what a greenhorn claims he did in the dark."

But de Rastignac and the others were not of his mind. They sought out the New Yorker on the slope of the knoll, kindled a flare of grass and helped him find two Pawnees he had killed, one near at hand, drilled by a bullet from the Colt, the other by the river bank with a rifle-ball in his heart.

"Don't ever tell me you can't shoot!" admired the Southerner. "You've done more than any of us tonight. I guess there won't be much talking about how easy it is to miss a buffalo, after this."

Presently Jud Timmons trotted up to the group, very much out of breath.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded. "Fust off they tell me Harv's dead—and then he knifed a hull Pawnee band!"

His eyes chanced upon the two grim corpses on the ground, and he stooped, pursing his lips.

"Skidi Pawnee, boys—Wolf tribe. That's why we heard so much howlin' earlier'n the evenin'. Thought 'twas queer, myself. But they struck from the east, and I reckoned they'd come from the west, if they come at all. Huh! And one's a warchief. Look at the coup-counts on his quiver. Who got 'em?"

"Harv did," de Rastignac answered triumphantly. "Both of them."

Jud's face went blank.

"Did, eh? Stand out here, Harv, and lemme have a look at you. By hunkey, yore jest the same! Wa'al, wa'al, you'll be callin' other fellers greenhorns next."

Weaver grinned uncomfortably.

"Maybe folks will believe now that I know what a Pawnee looks like," he said.

"Cain't dispute it, no, sirree. You done a good job, boy. I'm plumb proud of

you. So'd Kit be, too, if he knowed."

The trapper stirred the bodies with his foot.

"Go on and sculp 'em. They're yore fust ha'ar."

"I'm no Indian," replied Weaver, repressing a shudder of disgust. "But I'll tell you what I would like to do, and that's to have you men help me carry this pair inside the park. I'd like to prove to Little Pete that I learned to know a Pawnee when I saw one."

Jud chuckled gustily.

"Haw-haw! Dunno but that's as good an answer as any, Harv Shore, we'll lug 'em in. Come on, boys. Guess the joke's on the breed tonight.

And while Little Pete glowered and fingered his knife, and Cust sulked under a wagon, an uproarious crowd of trainmen deposited the two dead Pawnees at the breed's feet, the light of a convenient campfire playing upon the scene, and Weaver delivered his impromptu speech.

"You very kindly taught me what a Pawnee looked like the other night, Pete, and there were some people who wanted to make out that I hadn't appreciated your kindness. But I really did, and to prove it to you I'm leaving you these two Pawnees I just shot. They both wear hair-horns, and the real thing is better than buffalo tails branded with bacon-fat."

"You think I take 'nother man's scalp?" snarled Pete.

"Oh, no! But I knew you were interested in Pawnee hair-horns, and——"

The crowd began to laugh, and, cursing venomously, Pete slunk away between two wagons as K. Harrison appeared.

"Now, now, boys! All very well to celebrate a victory, but this is no way to keep order. Git to yore stations, every one of you. We sleep on our shootin'-irons tonight. And tomorrow brings hard work. Good for you, Weaver. I heerd tell of yore coup. We'll all promise to forget that buff'lo."

X

AFTER that night by the Pawnee Fork, Weaver was a different man. He was proud of what he had done, of course; but he kept his pride to himself. And nobody, not even de Rastignac, knew how high he had climbed from the depths of despondency in those few tense minutes when he fronted a score of Pawnee warriors. For Cust's silent malignity he had an equally silent contempt, and the two preserved an armed truce, which became one of the favorite topics of discussion over the campfires each night, and aroused no small concern in K. Harrison because of its influence in developing factionalism in the train. But Cust was as anxious as anybody not to lose any more men—the Pawnees had accounted for one of his company and two independent traders in that first wild rush up to the wagons—and so the quarrel simply simmered along. After all, it was difficult for men who had to work as hard as these to discover the energy for unnecessary fighting.

From the Pawnee Fork they journeyed across a mild "water scrape" to Big Coon Creek, and so on to the crossing of the Arkansas. They were fortunate in that the river was only moderately full, with a distance of a third of a mile from bank to bank, but it was sufficiently difficult to pass, at that.

"Great guns!" apostrophized de Rastignac, as he worked with Weaver and Jud shifting the goods out of their two wagons, in order that they might build a platform of timbers over the wagon-body on which their precious wealth could ride above the waters. "If I had thought I was going to have to work harder than any nigger I'd have tried trapping instead of trading. Do you mean to tell me this job has to be done every time you cross, Jud?"

"Say, young feller," drawled the trapper, "this ain't nothin' to what the Arkansaw might hand us. I seen the years we had to float the wagons acrost; calk 'em, by gum, and then pole the current."

"If you think you're working hard now, Hen, look at those fellows," called Weaver, laughing.

He pointed at the river, where one of Harrison's wagons was zigzagging through the crooked ford, twelve mule-teams hitched to it and a dozen men on either side of the wagon, ready to prop it up if it started to topple over. While they watched, one of the wheels sank tire-under, mired to the hub, and the shouting of the wagon-crew as they strained and lifted, the cracking of the two drivers' bull-whips, the splashing and creaking of timbers, came clearly to the bank. It looked for a minute as though the wagon were sinking deeper, and a dozen more men plunged into the water, carrying long poles to prop under its bed and pry it up; with their assistance the mired wheel was extricated, and the mules dragged their load free.

"Keep a-movin', men." Harrison's command rang through the still air. "If you let her settle a breath the quicksands'll cotch her. Flog up them mules, drivers. Keep a-movin'!"

"That's the word for the Arkansaw," approved Jud. "You jest gotter keep a-movin'. If you take a mite of rest the quicksands'll git you. And the wust of that is thar ain't never the same ford; 'cause the channel shifts from day to day. Whar you had easy goin' last year it's like to be a deep hole this. So you have to twist and turn if you ain't goin' to wet your goods, and twistin' and turnin' means slow goin', and slow goin' means mirin'—and thar you are, wrong whatsomever you do!"

Three days were required for the passage, and another day was employed in "greasing up" the axles and hubs, loading water casks and mending harness, for directly ahead lay the most dreaded section of the Trail: the Jornada del Muerto, or Journey of Death, across the Cimarron Desert, which separated the Arkansas from the headwaters of the Cimarron River. Five gallons of water was provided for each wagon and two days' cooked rations were prepared. And the wagons were warned to keep their proper intervals on the march, for the Cimarron was a favorite haunt of the Comanches, the most dreaded of the Southwestern tribes.

Weaver and de Rastignac rather hoped for a second Indian fight, but although that experience they missed, they were compelled to admit to Jud that they had all the hardships they wanted in the traverse. It took three days, instead of the usual two, because the train had barely climbed out of the high sandhills bordering the Arkansas, when it was struck by a hail storm, combined with thunder and lightning. The teams were terrified, and it became necessary to herd them inside an enclosure of wagons, where they might all stand with their tails to the stinging wind. An hour afterward the sky had cleared, the sun was blazing down and the least movement set up a sweat.

THE next day the train was plagued by mirages, visions of spreading lakes and lush groves along the skyline, and the blinding heat compelled even the oxen to plod along with heads hung low. Beside the way, the skeletons of beasts that had perished, fragments of broken wagons, odds and ends of belongings, worn moccasins, all told a tale of misfortunes in the past. Harrison issued stern orders that they must husband their water, but despite all precautions the last drop had gone before noon of the third day, and, when the leaders whooped that evening in token that the first spring in the Cimarron's sandy valley was in sight, men's tongues were swollen in their mouths.

Several oxen died during this traverse, but men pooled their teams in the interest of the common good, and the march was not greatly delayed. From the Cimarron it was more or less plain sailing. The dry heat, combined with the wear and tear of the Trail, had racked the wagons, and there was still danger from the Indians; but the wagons were tinkered into shape, tires wedged tight, broken hubs replaced, rawhide lashings used to strengthen wobbly axles. One way or another, they carried on. As for the Indians, a Mexican *cibolero*, or buffalo-hunter, they met a day's march beyond the Cimarron's dry bed informed them that the Apaches were not on the war-path and that the Comanches were raiding south in Texas.

This *cibolero* was the first white man they had seen since leaving Council Grove weeks before, and to the greenhorns he was a very romantic figure, with his trousers and shirt of goatskin, his sandals, his flat-crowned straw-hat, which was kept on his head by a plat beneath the chin, his huge-bored blunderbus, stoppered with a tassled plug, his pennoned lance slanting over his shoulder, his Indian bow and quiver of arrows and his tapaderas that swept the ground. He represented a new and strange civilization. For the first time the newcomers appreciated that the crossing of the Arkansas had taken them out of the United States; they were on foreign soil, subject henceforth to the chance caprices of a race which was rapidly growing jealous of the unrestrained expansion of the great republic of the North.

Harrison tried to obtain from the *cibolero* information as to political conditions at Santa Fé, but the Mexican professed entire ignorance. However, it did not escape the notice of so vigilant a person as Jud Timmons that the buffalo-hunter passed the evening at Cust's campfire; also, that when he parted from them in the morning he rode away in a direction which would lead straight to the settlements.

"Here's devilment brewin' or I'm a squaw," declared Jud, regarding the quaint figure galloping up the Trail.

"Why?" asked Weaver. "You said these chaps were always to be met across the Cimarron."

"Shore! And if it hadn't been this one, it would have been another, I s'pose. What gits me is what message he brung to Señor Ramon, and what message Señor Ramon give him."

"What makes you think he had any message?" interposed de Rastignac. "He may have stayed with Cust's men because some of them are his own kind."

"Wa'al, boy, his kind ain't as ign'rant as he made out to be. New Mexico is a big place, by the way you fellers from the States figure things, but thar ain't so many folks in it, and what goes on is known in every 'dobe from the Gallinas to the Bravo."

"But what message would Cust have to send?" pressed the Southerner.

"Ah! If I knowed that mebbe I'd be drawin' a bead on him right now. I don't like the way he's actin'. When his kind keeps their hate to theirselves, look out for knives in dark corners."

"I don't see what he can do to us," said Weaver, "so long as we obey the laws."

Jud pondered.

"Mexican law is somethin' no man ever yit got to understand," he answered finally. "Trouble with it is it gits changed so easy. Bad things to be up against, Mexican law—and I reckon Señor Ramon can monkey with it, if it suits his fancy."

The Trail beyond the Cimarron Valley trended south of west, and the country became rougher. One morning the travelers awoke to see a hazy outline of mountains in the northwest, and the greenhorns were spurred to their daily routine by the realization that they were in view of an outflung bulwark of the Rockies. It was hard to believe, but they were climbing steadily, and as a result the air was becoming dryer and the extreme heat easier to support. At midday the vista from horizon to horizon was one shimmering haze that did a devil's dance, painful to the eyes, but not nearly so staggering as the moist heat of the Mississippi Valley or the Eastern seaboard. On the other hand, the nights were usually cool.

The train did not meet another human being until the afternoon they crossed the Rio Colorado. Here a detachment of Mexican soldiers was stationed to keep watch on the Comanches. The *teniente* in command answered Harrison's questions with little more intelligence than the *cibolero*. Yes, Governor Armijo was still in power. No, they had heard no news.

Jud, whose knowledge of Spanish enabled him to interpret this dialogue to his friends, was more inclined to pessimism than ever.

"If 'twaren't for you boys, I'd strike off for Touse," he said, beside the fire that night. "Looks to me like thar was trouble brewin' for *Americanos* in Santey Fee."

"You don't need to stay with us, Jud," said Weaver.

"Certainly not," confirmed de Rastignac. "You've been fine to us, but we are able to walk alone now, and the worst part of the journey is behind us."

"So you think," jeered the trapper. "So do a lot of fellers that oughter be wiser'n you two. But I know better. No, sirree, the worst part of any journey to Santey Fee is when you git thar—'cause you can't never be sure what them greasers have been up to. I'm stickin' by you, boys. Remember, yore a long ways from home."

"I haven't any home," answered de Rastignac, in melancholy accents.

"Nor I," said Weaver, equally downcast.

Jud chuckled.

"No home is better'n the calabozo."

And despite their urgings, he insisted on continuing with them.

THE first houses the train had seen since leaving Fitzhugh's Prairie were two adobes near the crossing of the Rio Moro, and every man in camp cheered the humble dwellings in thankfulness that the barren breadth of the Great American Desert had been passed. To some, like Weaver and de Rastignac, who tried to peer into the future, it seemed prophetic that these loneliest of New Mexico's habitations were occupied, the one by George Carter, an American, and the other by an Englishman named Bonny.

The next morning the train started early, forded the Sapillo, and climbed a high mesa, at the foot of which was a tumbledown adobe ranch-house. On the opposite side of the mesa was the town of Las Vegas, and the Americans passed through its sprawling streets the following day without waiting for so much as a meal, the leaders, Cust no less than Harrison, being anxious to keep their men from the

temptation of *pulque* and *aguardiente*, indulgence in which liquors must have delayed the journey by several days.

Beyond Las Vegas the road climbed the mountains, and civilization's scanty impress was lacking again, for this country was as wild as the plains and as subject to the will of the untamed redskins. Moreover, the going was much more difficult. The road was only a name. They must clear the way of boulders to enable the wagons to pass, and at every ascent it was necessary to hitch on double teams to haul the heavy wagons to the summit; and, as often as not, a full team had to be attached to the rear axle for the descent, so that the wagon should not roll down on the hauling teams, crushing them and wrecking itself.

The topping of Ticelote Hill alone took four days. Another difficulty was that these mountains were densely wooded, and there was constant danger of an Indian attack. The men had no rest day or night, for the cavvy had to be surrounded by a heavy ring of sentries all of the dark hours. Jud and the rest of the old-timers were frank to say that the danger here was greater than on the prairies, and the greenhorns were of the opinion that the hardships were more pronounced than on any stretch of the Trail, except the Cimarron Jornada. In Big Canyon, for instance, which was full of short turns and steep pitches, six miles a day was considered good going for a large train; and after Big Canyon was behind them they had to cross another spur of the mountains, where the road was as bumpy as it had been short of Ticelote.

But all hands were light-hearted, for the end of the journey was already in sight. Emerging from the mountains, they traversed a belt of heavy pine timber, and pitched their last camp at Arroyo Hondo, six miles from Santa Fé. The wagons were soon parked, the cavvy picketed, and then everybody, except men on guard and cooks at the fires, turned to "to dandy up," as Jud put it.

Wagons were washed, clothes were washed, even bodies were washed. The more fastidious shaved and drew forth special Sunday-go-to-meeting suits, which had been stowed away under the wagon-seat for the seventy-three days on the Trail. New crackers were attached to the bull-whips. Weapons were polished. Anybody who possessed a likely horse was careful to groom it thoroughly.

In the morning at crack o' dawn the old shout of "catch up" was raised, and the wagons pulled out of park and swung into the road, every man, old-timers as well as greenhorns, straining his neck for the first glimpse of the town they had braved so many perils to reach.

It was an hour before noon when a cheer went up at the head of the column, and ran like a lighted powder-charge down the line of the wagons—"Santey Fee, boys!" "Thar she is!"

The bull-whips cracked urgently; mules and oxen were clucked to, cursed at, geed and hawed, and the pace of the train accelerated. But as each wagon topped the intervening rise there was a moment's halt while eyes feasted on the promised land.

"It doesn't look so big," said Weaver, with a burst of disappointment, when his turn came and he surveyed the wide-spread huddle of one-storied adobe structures which composed the town.

"Five thousand people, boy," answered Jud. "That's more'n you'll find anywhar this side o' Missoury."

"It looks dirty," complained de Rastignac, as his wagon forged up abreast of Weaver's.

Jud grinned.

"You ain't learned what dirt is like till you've sampled Santey Fee dirt," he advised. "But big or little, dirty or clean, that air's the place whar you two are a-goin' to make yore fortunes—or go bust. So treat it respectful."

XI

GREEN fields, divided by irrigation ditches, formed a belt around the town, and the valley was dotted with groves of trees; but Santa Fé, itself, looked bedraggled and untidy: a vast brick-kiln, with its products dumped in irregular squares and oblongs, or "like a fleet of flat-boats," in Weaver's phrase. What little attractiveness the town retained at a distance was lost the instant the train entered its outskirts, and the Americans perceived the filth and untidyness on every hand.

The inhabitants were picturesque in appearance, their garb colorful; but the vast majority were dressed in rags, and the most of the majority lacked even a sufficiency of rags to cover them. All shades of dark complexions were visible, from the copper-red of the pure-blooded Pueblos or Apaches through the varying shades of the breeds to the pale tan of an occasional

Spaniard. Hordes of beggars besieged the train, and yapping dogs seemed to be numbered by thousands.

The streets were narrow, and, in the prevailing dry weather, thick with dust; so soon as rain fell they would become quagmires. All the town's garbage and refuse was cast from the house-doors into the middle of the way, and left for the dogs to fight over and the winds to disperse—into the neighboring windows as often as not. Weaver and de Rastignac, retaining more fastidiousness than some of their companions, endeavored to step around the heaps of filth, but they rapidly learned that the only comfortable way to traverse the town was on horseback.

"Father always kicks because people let pigs run in Broadway," gasped Weaver, choking over the dust-clouds cast up by the grinding wheels. "But they aren't a patch on Santa Fé, and Broadway is like a garden compared to this."

"Look," cried de Rastignac. "There's a goat coming out of that front-door."

"He's probably cleaner than the family he lives with," rejoined Weaver.

At the edge of the Plaza, an immense open space of sun-baked earth bordered by continuous links of one-storied, flat-roofed adobe buildings, some of them white-washed, the train was met by a benevolent-looking old Mexican, with several dejected soldiers in attendance upon him.

"That air's Don Augustin Duran," Jud informed his greenhorn friends. "He's the customs collector. Come on up front, boys. Let's hear the bad news."

"I don't see why you are so sure we are to hear bad news," objected de Rastignac petulantly.

"Wa'al, boy, one reason is right afore yore eyes," answered the trapper, and he pointed to the opposite side of the plaza, where a second street debouched between the level mud walls of the houses.

A cavalcade of mule-drawn wagons was entering the square, and there was no doubt that the mounted figure in the lead was Cust.

"He was at the tail of the column when we started," said Weaver.

"Shore," assented Jud, "and he's swung out of line, goin' down to his own quarters. He's got a big *estancia* over thar, with a corral behind and plenty of store-room. Hope you notice, boys, thar ain't no customs officer apesterin' him."

"It's damned unfair," fumed de Rastignac.

"Shore is," replied Jud, unperturbed. "But it's life, leastways sech life as is lived in Mexico, and if you are aimin' to make a go of it out here you got to play Mexican rules."

"But what's all this got to do with bad news?" asked Weaver impatiently.

"Thar's one rule of entry for Señor Ramon, and 'nother rule for the rest," answered Jud. "He'd have to come along arter us if he hadn't knowed he'd lose time. I'm a-goin' up to hear what Don Augustin and K. are chewin' about."

The two greenhorns and most of the other men remaining with the train crowded forward and clustered about Harrison and the old Mexican official, who were in the midst of a heated argument in Spanish.

"What's wrong, K.?" hailed several independent traders.

"Everything, boys," the train captain replied angrily. "Somebody is out to frame us all for a loss. Wait a minute, while I——"

He turned back to the customs collector, and the flow of Spanish proceeded. Jud nodded his head wisely after he had heard a couple of exchanges.

"Ho-ho!" he murmured. "So, that's it! Boys, it seems Armijo has clapped on a real duty on *Americano* goods, and he's prohibitin' Americans from conductin' a retail trade."

"Duty?" said de Rastignac blankly. "I'd forgotten all about having to pay duty. Why, I haven't any money for that, anyway."

"The gov'nor would have trusted you under the old plan," explained Jud, still with an ear cocked toward the debate that was going on in front of them. "But I reckon it don't matter whether he'll trust you or not, with this skin-game he's proposin'. The duty used to be a flat five hundred dollars a wagon, and no examination for contraband, which meant that you could bring in a leetle illegal stuff if you wore keerful. Don Augustin says the duty's been raised to seven hundred and fifty dollars a wagon, and——"

Harrison broke off his conversation with the Mexican, and addressed his followers.

"Men," he said, "I don't know whether we can get a better deal, but things look bad. Don Augustin says that not only has the flat duty been raised to seven hundred and fifty dollars a wagon, but all goods must be taken at once to the custom house and stored for inspection, whar they'll be valued and extry duties assessed. They'll run up a couple of thousand dollars a

wagon-load on us, I guess. And that ain't all. Thar's a special decree jest issued against Americans doing any retail business."

One of the older independent traders cursed hoarsely.

"Why, this'll wipe us out, K.! Mebbe you kin afford to pay Don Augustin's new duties, but we leetle fellers cain't—and even you cain't make much of a profit sellin' wholesale."

"This is for Cust's benefit!" shouted a second man.

"Shore is," stormed a score of voices. "Señor Ramon rigged this on us."

A SNARL swept through the close-packed ranks, and old Don Augustin started, a shadow of fear on his white-bearded features.

"Let's learn the rat a lesson," suggested the man who had first accused Cust.

But Harrison spread wide his arms and gestured for attention.

"Boys, boys, you cain't do thataway," he rebuked them earnestly. "Yo're in Mexico. Yore own Gov'ment won't stand behind you if you don't obey the Mexican laws. I ain't got any more use for a certain feller than you have, but I know we'd jest play into his hands if we laid ourselves open to the *calaboso* and confiscation. Ride easy, now, and leave things to me. Take yore goods to the customs house, and let Don Augustin receipt for 'em. He's square, if nobody else is. I'm goin' to see the gov'nor." One eyelid trembled slightly. "Thar ain't never no knowin' but what Don Manuel will listen to reason, if you use the right argument."

Several men laughed loudly, Jud amongst them.

"You didn't git what K. insinivated," he remarked to his charges, as the train resumed its slow journey across the dusty plaza. "Armijo is like all Mexicans I ever met; he kin be persuaded to sell out for a reasonable consideration."

The trapper's manner became sober.

"That's all very well for K.," he continued reflectively; "but it ain't liable to git you fellers anywhar. You ain't got money to pay out bribes—and I don't see much chance of yore gittin' any."

"You are cheerful," Weaver commented bitterly, seeing his hopes of the future blasted at the moment he had believed success assured.

"I'm not blinkin' what bad medicine I find in the trail," returned Jud.

At the custom house the Americans went through the laborious process of unloading their wagons and storing the contents in the cool interior of the building. Each one was given a space adequate to contain his possessions, and Don Augustin handed out slips of paper certifying that goods as enumerated in the several manifests were in his custody, subject to removal on compliance with the fiscal laws of the Republic of Mexico.

By this time it was late in the afternoon, and the independent traders stood idly in the plaza with Harrison's wagon crews, nobody knowing what he should do. An atmosphere of profound gloom embraced them all, in striking contrast with the exhuberant humor in which they had concluded their journey that morning. Occasionally a man drifted off in search of a drink, and after he had whiffed the breaths of several upon their return and noted a disposition to a cheerier outlook, de Rastignac suggested that Weaver and Jud go with him to the source of such refreshment. But the trapper shook his head.

"No, no, boys, not yit. We got lots of time comin' for that. Right now, let's stay sober. I know this Touse lightnin' they call whisky here—and it's bad stuff, 'specially if you ain't used to it. Hold on, here comes K. Let's hear his news. It's moderate bad, jedgin' by his face."

Indeed, the train captain looked scarcely happier than when he had gone to his audience with the governor. He walked wearily into the centre of the group.

"Boys, it looks like a raw deal for the one and two wagon men," he said briefly. "The gov'nor will sell out on the extry duties. I was purty shore he would. That is, if you give him a handsome present, he'll let you off on an inspection of yore goods. And from the way he talked, I reckon he mought give you a permit to take 'em on to El Paso or Chihuahua. But he won't be budged on refusin' to let us sell retail. Near as I kin make out, Señor Ramon has got to him and suggested thar ain't no reason why the two of 'em cain't git all the cream 'stead of jest the best part. My advice is that you all say leetle and saw wood. Hang on as long as you kin, and see what happens. I'd help you boys, if I could—take over yore goods, say—but I'm goin' to have all I kin do to cl'ar my own stuff and git rid of it at a shaded loss."

He hesitated.

"That's all. Now, don't git gay. Look

out for yore *pulque* rations, and go slow on thisyere Touse lightnin'. It won't do no good, neither, to talk loose about roustin' out Cust. If anybody goes for to hurt him we'll all git jailed."

For a moment nobody answered.

"Cust's his name, and cussed he will be," Jud drawled slowly. "How's that for a sampler markin', K.?"

The jest broke the tensity of the moment, and a roar of laughter fetched the Mexican bystanders running to see what was amusing the mad *Americanos*.

In the confusion K. walked over to Jud.

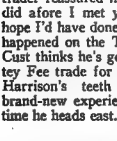
"You and your greenhorn friends come with me," he said kindly. "I got reasonable quarters up the plaza, plenty of room for three more. I'm kind of skeered you boys picked a bad year to break into the trade," he added, addressing Weaver and de Rastignac direct. "And I don't want for you to run short and git hungry."

"That's very courteous of you, sir," acknowledged the Southerner, with one of his sweeping bows.

"But see here, Captain," exclaimed Weaver. "You know I'm most likely responsible for all this trouble, if Cust is behind it."

"'Tain't yore fault, young feller," the trader reassured him. "I know what you did afore I met you; Kit tol' me, and I hope I'd have done the same As for what happened on the Trail, I'm with you. If Cust thinks he's goin' to strangle the Santey Fee trade for his own convenience—" Harrison's teeth clicked—"he's got a brand-new experience comin' to him next time he heads east."

XII



THE October air was like wine, but Weaver's shoulders drooped with discouragement as he walked across the Plaza to Harrison's quarters. Jud Timmins was lounging outside the door, and greeted him with forced cheeriness.

"Wa'al, boy, what luck?"

"No luck." The New Yorker sank down on the 'dobe doorstep. "Every time I hunt up a customer Cust gets wind of it and underbids me. I suppose if I gave goods away I could find people to accept them, otherwise——"

He shrugged his shoulders, entirely despondent.

"Shucks," drawled Jud, squirting a mouthful of tobacco-juice at an inquisitive fly. "You shore have had a raw deal, Harv. Nigh three weeks, and not a durn cent! But the other fellers are jest as bad off. K. was sayin' this afternoon he ain't sold enough to pay his freight bills. Whar's Henry?"

Weaver sat up straighter.

"I'm afraid he's over at Rafaelo's. I'm as worried about him as anything else, Jud. He isn't used to this kind of thing, and he hasn't any trading instinct at all. And he drinks. He'd be playing monte, too, if he had the money."

"I know." Jud nodded sympathetically. "Here comes K. now. We'll git him, and go and pry Henry loose from his likker."

Harrison's step matched Weaver's for despondency; his face was overcast with gloom.

"What d'you think I heard?" he said as he reached them. "Cust is buyin' out three of the independents. Made 'em an offer that lets 'em jest about break even. Said the rest would have to take less."

"I'll—I'll—" Weaver choked on his wrath. "Before I sell out to him I'll——"

"I feel the same way you do," returned Harrison. "But it don't do any good to git mad. The skunk's got us by the funnybone. With the stuff he picks up cheap from the one and two wagon men and the strangle-hold he has on retail sellin', he'll shut me out of every market in the country. All I kin do is store my goods, and go back to the States to wait until somebody drills Señor Ramon or Armijo has a fallin'-out with him. Whar's yore pardner?"

"I was going over to Rafaelo's to get him," answered Weaver.

"So'm I," said Jud. "Come along, K. Thatair Henry needs watchin'. He's too durn quick on the trigger."

Harrison's look of gloom was replaced by a hint of alarm.

"He's a fire-eater," he assented. "Shore, I'll go with you. Cain't afford to have any ruckus, boys. That's what Señor Ramon would like fine."

"You reckonin' to go east afore winter?" inquired Jud as they all rose.

"Looks like it," responded the trader. "I'll have to write off this year as a loss for the colonel. If Kit Carson wore here we might mend things, but he's the only man I know could work agin' Cust with the Mexicans."

"He's due pretty soon, isn't he?" inquired Weaver.

"Yes, but pretty soon ain't soon enough.

Young feller, if I was you I'd accept 'most any offer Cust made me."

"And be frozen out of the trade?" retorted Weaver indignantly. "He'd try the same trick on me next year—that is, if I ever got capital to start again."

"You mought try trappin'," consoled Harrison. "Jud would take you on, and I'll speak up for you with the colonel and St. Vrain in St. Louis. Marcellin most likely would wipe off yore debt when he heard how it happened. He's that kind. And I don't know but the colonel mought not feel the same way."

"I'm obliged to you," said Weaver, "but I'm going to fight Cust as long as I can last. I'd rather store my goods with you, if you'd let me, than sell out to him at any price, even a profit."

K. gave him an approving pat on the back.

"Yo're as much of a scrapper as that Loosyaner tiger-cat, Harv! And you shore kin store with me. But here's Rafaelo's, and they seem to be havin' a considerable party inside."

The wine-shop made some pretense to imitating the properties of an American bar, for it was a favorite resort of the American trappers and traders from the States.

The reason for the unusual noise became apparent at first glance, for one end of the bare, earth-floored room was occupied by a party headed by de Rastignac, while at the opposite end Cust and certain of his cronies, including Little Pete, were treating the three independent traders who had sold out to the governor's agent.

BETWEEN the two groups was passing a running fire of taunts and unflattering comments, which came to a head as Weaver crossed the threshold.

"The trouble with you men is that you're jealous because your friends got a good price," sneered Cust.

"Good price!" growled a man with de Rastignac. "They got what they paid in St. Louis, and their freightage out here."

"It's more than any of the rest of you will get," replied Cust, tossing off a mug of whisky.

"We don't want your dirty money!" cried another independent trader.

"Now, boys! Now, boys!" interposed K. "Quarreling won't help to——"

"Your pardon, Mr. Harrison," said de Rastignac. "If you will grant me a minute's indulgence? I have a proposition to make to Mr. Cust."

Cust laughed sourly.

"If it's a business proposition, well and good," he answered. "I'm not a duelist, my friend."

A bleak light flickered in the Southerner's eyes.

"If I ever have a proposition, other than a business proposition, to make to you, sir, you will render me a satisfactory reply," he stated coldly. "As it happens, the matter I am concerned with is of a business character."

"Ah! That's a new rôle for you," exclaimed Cust with a hint of mockery.

De Rastignac inclined his head.

"It is. Briefly, sir, my understanding is that you wish to acquire all the goods fetched to Santa Fé in our train."

He paused interrogatively, and Cust laughed a second time.

"I reckon that's nearly correct—except that I *will* acquire them, and on my own terms."

Harvey tried to catch his friend's eye, fearful that de Rastignac would allow himself to be trapped by a tricky offer; but the Southerner's attention was concentrated upon their enemy.

"I am not a business man, as you have inferred," he said. "Therefore I have a suggestion to offer. I will gamble with you for my wagonload of goods."

He produced a folded paper and dropped it on the bar.

"Here is the manifest, sir."

Cust gaped at him.

"Gamble!" repeated the trader. "Why—why——"

"Any game you choose," offered de Rastignac.

"It's—why, I never heard of such a thing," gulped Cust. Then, with a return to his ordinarily haughty manner, "Why should I gamble with you for goods which you or your creditors must ultimately sell to me on my own terms?"

"I take it you are afraid of the risk," said de Rastignac.

The group of independent traders applauded this defiance, but Weaver plucked at his friend's sleeve.

"Don't press him, Henri," he begged in a whisper. "You are more likely to lose than he, and it's wicked to risk one thousand two hundred dollars' worth of goods on such——"

"They came to me by gambling," replied de Rastignac, "and I see no reason why

they should not go from me by gambling—that is, if I lack the good-fortune to win."

Harrison added his plea to Weaver's.

"Yo're foolish, boy. I'll store yore goods for you until——"

"Thank you, Mr. Harrison, but that will not satisfy my immediate needs," rejoined the Southerner. "I am, sir, I fear, a better gambler than trader."

Cust, who had been frowning savagely at Weaver ever since the New Yorker stepped forward, now thrust himself in front of his supporters.

"Your friends appear not to be so confident as you are," he called. "Maybe you've changed your mind."

De Rastignac pointed to the manifest lying between them.

"On the contrary, sir. My stakes are tabled."

Cust looked about him irresolutely.

"You're same as a professional gambler," he said. "I'm not——"

"I suggest that we cut a pack of cards," interrupted de Rastignac.

A gasp of excitement went up from the crowded room.

"Stake a hull wagonload of goods on the turn of a card!" exclaimed a trapper.

"No, no, Henri," pleaded Weaver. "You mustn't take such a chance. We may be able to sell out at an advantage yet."

"Not if I'm alive," snapped Cust. "I'll take you up, de Rastignac. Give us a pack of cards, Rafaelo."

"I'm ag'in' this," proclaimed Harrison energetically.

"Back yore oxen, K.," exclaimed Jud, speaking for the first time in the debate. "You cain't turn the boy—and mebbe his medicine is workin' good."

"His medicine!" protested Weaver. "Man, Jud, he's had too much to drink. We mustn't let him——"

"Cain't stop a grown man if he wants to bet," said Jud philosophically.

"But if he wins, what good will it do?" reminded Weaver.

"Shore," agreed Harrison. "He cain't sell nothin'."

"It'll be somethin' if he beats out Señor Ramon," returned Jud. "Now, hold still, you two. Let's see how Henry's medicine is feelin'."

Both parties in the room crowded closer to the bar on which lay de Rastignac's manifest and a dirty pack of cards produced by Rafaelo.

"Will you cut first?" the Southerner inquired courteously.

"No," exploded Cust. "Think I'll give you the chance to cut over me?"

De Rastignac silently reached down and picked up a third of the deck, turning the lowermost card face up. It was the seven of diamonds.

"That's not hard to beat," snorted Cust.

He fingered the remaining cards a moment, then snatched up a block of them—and revealed the six of spades.

"Hell!" he exclaimed.

De Rastignac's friends howled with glee, but the Southerner raised his hand to curb them.

"I have won a wagonload of goods from you," he said. "I will now stake two wagonloads against a like quantity to match them."

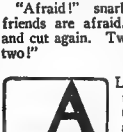
Cust hung back, until Weaver frantically broke into the front rank.

"For goodness sake, listen to reason," argued the New Yorker. "You've doubled your investment, Henri. Let well enough alone."

De Rastignac shook his head slightly.

"If Mr. Cust is not afraid——"

"Afraid!" snarled Cust. "It's your friends are afraid. All right, go ahead and cut again. Two wagons against your two!"



ALL thirty-odd men in the wine-shop craned their necks expectantly as de Rastignac's hand darted out and lifted a block of cards. The jack of clubs showed as he turned them up.

"A good cut," muttered several bystanders.

"Hard to beat," commented Harrison, who had succumbed to the lure of the contest.

Cust's hand quivered above the deck, divided it—and showed the queen of diamonds.

"Your own suit went against you!" he yelped, savagely exultant. "There go your two wagons, de Rastignac. Well, have you had enough of gambling? Anything else you would like to bet?"

"Unfortunately, sir, I have nothing worth staking against you," answered de Rastignac impassively. "If I might suspect you to be possessed——"

Weaver battered a hand down upon the table-top. A gust of passion had mastered him.

"I've got a wagon to stake against you, Cust," shouted the New Yorker. "Cover that, if you dare!"

A look of astonishment dawned in de Rastignac's face.

"I beg of you, Harvey," he said, almost irritably, "do not consider that you must follow my example. You are not accustomed to——"

"When one's willing the other always wants to beg off," cried Cust. "Hold up, my gambler friend. You had your turn. Let your pardner have his. It ought not to take long to wipe him out."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Harrison. "Both the durned fools'll be ruined now."

But Jud Timmons, licking his lips like a cat that had been in the cream, wagged a shaggy head.

"Depends on his medicine, K. Come to think on it, Harv's medicine allus has stood by him."

"You talk like a fool Injun!" snapped K., and returned his attention to the table in front of them.

The cards, restacked, lay on the knotted boards. Cust pointed to them.

"Go on, Yankee," he said contemptuously. "First cut to you."

Weaver eyed him coolly.

"I think not," answered the New Yorker. "You were favored with second cut in your match with Mr. de Rastignac. You can't expect to have the advantage every time."

"Fair enough!" shouted several men. Even Cust's followers urged him to waive his claim.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," he replied shortly. "If the Yankee is afraid——"

He emulated de Rastignac's swift cut, lifting a good half of the pack. The queen of diamonds showed again.

"What about that, Yankee?" he demanded, while his men stamped and cheered. "I've got a queen working for me."

Weaver picked up all except one card of those on the table; the bottommost was the king of clubs.

The cheering that acclaimed him was so loud that men came pelting to the door and windows to peer in at the diversions of the mad *Americanos*. Jud beat the New Yorker on the back until he was sore.

"Knowed it! Knowed it!" howled the trapper. "You got a good medicine, boy."

Harrison grasped Weaver's arm.

"That's done," exclaimed K. with undisguised relief. "Come on, now, you crazy Yankee. Yo're more trouble than yore light-triggered pardner."

De Rastignac, too, besought Weaver to drop out:

"That was fine, Harv, but you've done all that's necessary. I can't tell you how grateful I am for keeping the rascal from winning a wagon."

Harvey was more than half-inclined to heed his friends' admonitions. He started to back away from the table, but Cust bellowed a fierce protest.

"What sort of a gambler are you, Mr. Yankee? D'you just play till you win? Stay here, and give me a fair chance at revenge."

Weaver turned immediately. The same gust of passion that had made his neck feel stiff previously gripped him again.

"I am ready to match you," he said. "Go on—Señor Ramon."

Cust's lips curled back.

"That's calling me out of my name, Yankee."

"Is it? Well, my name is not Yankee. Are you intending to cut?"

This time Cust hesitated at dividing the deck. Twice his fingers hovered down; the third time he raised them to reveal the ten of clubs.

Not a man spoke. The room was so still that the labored breathing of the watchers was audible. Every eye was glued upon Weaver's hand as he stretched out his arm and raised the remaining heap of cards about two-thirds of the way down.

He had cut the jack of clubs.

The walls rocked again to the din of his faction's rejoicing, but Weaver never regarded it. He leaned forward, white-faced and stern.

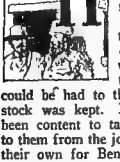
"Will you match me for four wagons, Señor Ramon?" he asked.

"I'll see you damned first!" roared Cust. "And you'll hear more of this, Mr. Yankee. Your luck ain't what you think it is."

As the governor's agent forced a passage from the wine-shop Weaver was hoisted on the shoulders of a dozen of the independent traders, his skull just missing the low ceiling each time they swayed from end to end of the room. He might have had all the intoxicating liquor he could hold without expending a cent of his own, but he joined his voice with Harrison's to beg all their friends to stay sober.

"We've put one over on Señor Ramon," said K., "or, leastways, Harv has; but you don't want to give Armijo a chance to run us all into the calabozo for bustin' loose. Take it on a trot, boys. We're a long ways from home."

XIII



HARRISON'S quarters consisted of a large room, perhaps twenty feet square, opening on the street, and in rear of that several others with windows on a yard through which access could be had to the corral in which the stock was kept. Most of his men had been content to take the wages accruing to them from the journey and strike off on their own for Bent's Fort or Taos, with the intention of joining a trapper outfit and spending the approaching winter in the mountains. There remained only a dozen or so, and half of these were always in the corral, where a 'dobe hut gave shelter at night or when it rained. Those who were not on duty with the livestock lived in the house with their employer, ran errands for him, cooked, and most of the time loafed.

The night of Weaver's exploit at Rafaelo's there must have been a round dozen of men at supper in the big front room, all discussing eagerly the humiliation of Cust, and, in more subdued tones, what might come of it.

"You want to watch yore backs, boys," advised Harrison.

"Yes, Mr. Cust is not the sort of person who would stand up to receive another man's fire," commented de Rastignac. "But I cannot bring myself to take seriously the animosity of so cowardly——"

Wwwhh-whut! A gray streak slid through the door, flashed breast-high across the room and buried itself in Weaver's arm.

"I'm stabbed," he exclaimed.

A babble of outcries responded to the New Yorker; several men made for the door, and in the lead de Rastignac. Indeed, de Rastignac was on his feet before Weaver cried out, for the deftly-flung blade had sped across the line of his vision, and he realized what had happened with the sixth sense of the born fighter. The Southerner was in the doorway, revolver drawn, a second after his friend was hit, in ample time to sight the scuttling figure zigzagging down the narrow street that split the right-hand wall of buildings surrounding the Plaza.

"Do you see him?" cried those behind. "Where did he go?" "Let me out, Rasteenack." "Here, give us a shot."

"One moment, if you please," replied the Southerner. "These shadows are somewhat puzzling, but——"

His weapon rose, fell and exploded, so rapidly as to defy the eye to follow the separate motions. The flame jetted from the long muzzle, which leaped up from the heavy recoil, and de Rastignac returned it to his holster.

"You might see who it is," he remarked casually. "I must assist Weaver."

He found his friend somewhat pale, but sitting up against the wall while Jud examined the wounded arm, with some assistance from Harrison.

"Get him?" asked K.

De Rastignac nodded.

"How are you feeling, Harv?" he inquired.

"Fine," answered Weaver. "I think I moved just as he threw. He meant to hit the heart, but the blade went too far to the left and cut the inside of my arm." He grinned. "I've got a wound in each arm now. That Pawnee's lance pricked the right one."

The Southerner bent to scrutinize the cut.

"Are you sure he'll be all right, Jud? Hadn't we better find a doctor?"

"No doctor in Santey Fee kin beat Jud Timmons," retorted the trapper. "No, siree, Harv's doin' mighty well. Lost a mite of blood, but all it amounts to is somethin' to show to his grandchildren."

Harrison had picked up the knife from the floor.

"Reg'lar Mexican splitter," grunted the trader. "I'm 'mazed 'twasn't Little Pete's."

"Shore, here he is," responded a voice in the doorway.

"Who?" snapped Harrison.

"Little Pete, K. He's dead as Dan'el Boone. Rasteenack drilled him in the ear."

"Has he got his knife on?" demanded the trader.

The men who were carying the inert figure dumped it on the dirt-floor, and one of them rolled it over to expose the hip.

"Thar she is, K," he said, and drew the handsomely wrought blade from its sheath.

"'Twaren't him, then," muttered Harrison, aghast. "For God's sake, Rasteenack, look what you've done! Thar'll trouble come from this."

"That, of course, I cannot dispute, Mr. Harrison," replied the Southerner, "but I must insist that if this is the man I shot it was he who flung the knife at Weaver. I was sitting near the door; I observed the knife in the air before it struck Weaver,

and I was in the doorway in ample time to see the man who had thrown it. He was running down that street to the right of us, jumping from side to side. You don't mean to tell me that a man who was innocent of wrong-doing would have been fleeing like that?"

"N-no, but——"

Jud wiped the blood from his hands, and stood up.

"Shore, Pete did it," said the trapper almost scornfully. "What you done with yore wits, K.? He carried a extry knife apurpose to cover his trail. Ever'body knowed that knife of his'n, and if he hadn't sense to realize that, him as sent him had."

"Humph," said Harrison, staring thoughtfully at the ugly visage of the breed. "You fellers are right. No doubt of it. But—but—yes, sirree, I 'most wish you'd missed him, Rasteenack."

The Southerner's eyes flashed.

"Must we submit to tolerating attempted murder because——"

"Wa'al, you see, Harv wasn't murdered; not that that was Pete's fault. But the fact is, we'll likely run into more trouble."

"I don't see why," expostulated Weaver, whose strength was returning in consequence of the fiery dram Jud had just poured into him. "Pete is notorious for this kind of thing, and if he wasn't notorious——"

"Ah, boy, but yo're an American, and Pete is a Mexican! And this is Mexico."

"My advice," said de Rastignac after a moment of silence, "is to carry the attack to our opponents, particularly if you have any reason to anticipate an unpleasant issue of the affair. For myself—" he shrugged in the Gallic way which became him—"I am perfectly content to shoulder all responsibility for my own action. It need concern nobody else."

There was a loud outcry at this.

"Say young feller, what d'you think I am?" Harrison said with some temper. "Forget that, now! We're all in this mess together. And I'll say this, too: if I'd been in yore place out thar in the street, with this greaser under my sights, I'd have bored him. I pray to glory, I would!"

"Jest the same," spoke up Jud, "thar's a heap of sense in what Henry says. 'Stead of waitin' for Armijo to send his Leatherhats down here, let's go up and complain to him of the assault committed on us. Come on! Harv can walk, if I help him. A couple of you git a blanket and carry Pete along for evidence. We'll go with the case all prepared, jest like the lawyers do."

"I'm for it," supported Weaver. "I can't believe Armijo will stand for this kind of thing."

Harrison tugged at his mustache, reflecting.

"I give the old boy more credit than that, myself," he admitted. "Can't hurt none to try it, anyways."

THEY had scarcely passed the door and the swaying mob of curious Mexicans jammed against the house, when the regular tramp of feet echoed from the middle of the Plaza. A shrill challenge rang out in Spanish, and Harrison halted abruptly.

"For God's sake, hold still, boys!" he exclaimed. "The soldiers are coming after us."

He broke off to shout a question in Spanish.

"*Si, si,*" he assented to the answer, but Jud was ahead of him in translating the order.

"Git back, all of you, inside the house. The gov'nor, himself, is here."

They stumbled back as quickly as they could, trampling feet at their heels, and as Pete's body was deposited on one side of the room two Mexican officers entered the doorway, with Gust between them. One was Don Augustine Duran, the customs collector; the other, a much more vigorous man, alert, with an intelligent, aggressive face, was the governor, Don Manuel Armijo. Bayonets flashed at the windows, and at a sign from the governor two soldiers entered and took post at the rear door of the house.

Cust's features were diabolical in the fluttering lamp-light. They expressed only triumph as he strode in with the governor, but when his eyes fell upon the body of Little Pete, he started; a momentary expression of fear was revealed, and then was supplanted by indignation, which found vent in a torrent of Spanish, accompanied by denunciatory gestures at the Americans.

Presently, the governor interjected a phrase which stayed Cust's storm of words, and Don Manuel turned to Harrison.

"What is this?" he asked in broken English. "I come to you to arrest certain of

your company for an offense against our laws, and I find that you have also murdered one of my people."

"No, no, Don Manuel," denied Harrison. "This dead man was Little Pete. He stole up to the door, and threw a knife at Señor Weaver——"

"Señor Weaver is one of you I came to arrest," interrupted the governor. "Is he present?"

Harrison indicated the New Yorker. The governor regarded him sternly.

"And I seek, also, a Señor de Rastignac," he added.

Harrison pointed to the Southerner.

"Good!" exclaimed the governor. "Now, go on with your story. You say the dead man threw a knife. Did he hit anyone?"

Weaver exhibited his bandaged arm.

"And the knife?" demanded the governor.

Jud lifted the blood-stained weapon from the blanket on which Pete lay and offered it to the governor. Instantly Cust burst into Spanish again, the trapper nodding his head sardonically to all that was said.

"And what's more," concluded Jud, when Cust had finished, "the durn coyote had his own knife with him all the time. He never drawed it to use."

"This is a strange story," remarked the governor sarcastically. "You charge a man with murder, committed by the knife, and then admit that the knife used is not his."

De Rastignac folded his arms rather melodramatically across his breast and stepped in front of Armijo.

"Sir," said the Southerner, "from your rank I presume you to be a gentleman. It should suffice for you, then, when I inform you, as one gentleman to another, that I, who killed this carrion here, saw him in the act of running from the scene of his attempted crime."

"So *you* killed him," commented the governor.

"By the eternal," swore Cust. "This passes all, Don Manuel! The fellow boasts of it."

"I trust my word is sufficient," answered de Rastignac.

A twinkle came in the governor's eye.

"Quite sufficient for me, señor, who am no more than a poor sheepherder raised to office by the people's pleasure," he assented.

"We're mighty grateful to you for helping to hang yourself," said Cust.

"That comes well from you, who set Pete to murder me!" flared Weaver.

"All words," sneered Cust.

Harrison smashed a big fist into the open palm of one hand.

"Don Manuel," he said slowly, "I'm a patient man, and known to you for reasonably honest, and I say to you that if you try to fasten any crime on Rasteenack for killing that rattlesnake thar you'll—you'll——"

He waved one hand hopelessly.

"Ah, you threaten me, per'aps, Señor Harrison?" the governor inquired politely.

"No. I don't threaten you," roared Harrison. "I'm jest a-tellin' you. I'm jest a-tellin' you that Kit Carson is comin' soon. I'm jest a-tellin' you that *Americanos* may be easy fools to graft on and bushwhack around; but you was in Texas when the Texans got tired of sech doin's as this, and you——"

The governor bowed politely.

"I appreciate all that you say, Señor Harrison. But it is beside the point of our discussion. If your friends are not guilty of having murdered this Pete no harm shall befall them. At present, however, there is, at least, a suspicion thrown upon them——"

"A suspicion!" rasped Cust. "I charge them with having murdered him."

The governor lifted his hands in a gesture of deprecation.

"You see, Señor Harrison? I am helpless in the case. They are charge', formally. And moreover, if that were not so, they still stand guilty of a most audacious offense against our fiscal laws, which the majesty of the republic requires shall be punished."

"Offense?" repeated Harrison. "Against the fiscal laws? Why, boys," he addressed Weaver and de Rastignac, "what have you done? Kin he pin it on you?"

Both shook their heads, and the governor, with a smile, issued an order in Spanish to Don Augustin, who had stood patiently throughout the conversation.

THE customs collector cleared his throat, produced a legal document from his pocket and began to read in flowing Castillian sentences a long, involved arraignment, which brought exclamations of astonishment from every man in the room who could understand it.

"By hokey, boys," said Jud, "he's goin'

to jail you for winnin' them wagons from Cust."

"Can you beat it?" muttered Harrison. "They broke the law against doin' business retail, 'cause they gambled wholesale."

He waved to Don Augustin to suspend, and assailed the governor once more.

"D'you mean to tell me, Don Manuel," he demanded, "that you actually intend to punish these young men because they gambled in goods with yore own agent?"

"With whom they gambled, señor, is of no account," replied the governor. "What does count is that they deliberately, and with maleficent intent, as Don Augustin has just recited, broke the terms of the decree fiscal, which was duly communicated to all foreign merchants in Santa Fe, in that they attempted to avoid the compulsion against retail trading by foreigners by wagering their goods in wagonloads. The offense is perfectly clear, señor, and I am of a mind to administer a lesson to those *Americanos* who regard our laws as no more than words to be flouted."

"This is ridiculous," protested de Rastignac angrily. "It is a barefaced attempt to steal our property."

"I never heard of a more outrageous proceeding," called Weaver. "When did gambling become trading? And what has wholesale gambling to do with retail selling?"

"Now you're caught, you begin to feel uncomfortable, eh?" jeered Cust. "I told you you'd hear more of that job in Rafaelo's."

Weaver started to reply to him, then bethought himself of an unused argument.

"But, governor, we have never had possession of the wagons we won," he blurted out.

One of Don Manuel's eyelids fluttered oddly.

"Ah, no, sir," he agreed. "You see, the wagons for which you gambled, yours as well as those of the señor with whom you played, have been impounded by the state."

"You—you mean our goods are—you've taken them?" cried Weaver.

"I do, señor. A part of the punishment prescribed for such an offense is the confiscation of the guilty merchant's property."

Jud laid a warning hand on the New Yorker's elbow.

"Keerful, boy," whispered the trapper. "Henry, don't you go for them pistols. Thar's sogers all around, and they'd drill the lot of us."

Weaver swallowed hard.

"Is it the governor's meaning that we are to be imprisoned, as well as robbed?" de Rastignac asked coldly.

"The governor's meaning is that you are going to scratch lice in the calabozo," swaggered Cust.

Harrison moved in front of the partners.

"That'll do for you, Cust," said the trader shortly. "The gov'nor kin say what he likes. You keep shet in here." Then to the governor: "Cain't you leave these young fellers with me, Don Manuel? I'll be responsible for 'em."

"I regret that to be impossible," sighed Armijo. "*Teniente!*" A slightly ragged officer and a squad of very ragged infantrymen jammed through the street-door, the soldiers trailing muskets as tall as themselves. "Conduct these two *Americanos* to the *calabozo*. Don Augustin will accompany you."

"Don't we get a trial?" protested Weaver.

"A trial?" queried Armijo. "But certainly, señor. All in good time."

"They can be tried tomorrow," declared Harrison. "And you know it."

"But, Señor Harrison," submitted the governor, "here are two men, the pair of them charged with two separate crimes, not ordinary crimes, but very grave crimes, murder of a citizen of the republic, a citizen poor but—" he coughed slightly—"ah—respected; and likewise, conspiracy to defraud the republic of revenues. Such crimes, even in your great republic of the North, could not be lightly brought to trial. No, no! It would not be fair. We must be patient, señor, we must let justice take its course."

Smiling beatifically, the governor ushered his prisoners before him into the street. Jud hung out of a window as they were led across the Plaza.

"Don't lose heart, boys," he called. "We won't forgit you—and Kit's comin'."

"It'll take more than Kit Carson to get us out of this scrape," Weaver muttered sadly.

"I really must have this fellow Cust out, and shoot him," said de Rastignac. "He is an animal. I beg your pardon, Harvey? You were saying— Oh, but the serious crime they allege is mine, you know. I'm afraid I can't share it with you. My one concern is to have an opportunity to sight Cust over a pistol-barrel. He isn't a gentleman, of course, any more than this monkey of a governor, but on the frontier I suppose one must relax the application of

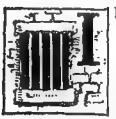
the code. But as I was about to say, I shall endeavor to make these people understand that it is I——"

They argued this subject until they passed the grimy portals of the *calabozo*, and after being searched and deprived of their weapons, were pushed into a straw-filled room with one barred window high up in the outer wall.

"How proud my father would be if he knew my first venture as an independent trader led me to jail!" reflected Weaver.

De Rastignac had no reflections. He found a moderately clean corner and, having ascertained that Weaver's arm was comfortable, went to sleep. He needed sleep to keep his nerves under control, and he must have his nerves under control to shoot well—and he refused to believe that Fate could be so unkind as to deny him an opportunity to shoot again.

XIV



IN THE morning the two prisoners awoke with a spontaneous optimism, compound of youth and the sheer luxury of being alive; but as the day progressed it seemed to them that they were as good as buried. Their cell had the characteristics of a tomb. It was dank; it was dark; it was silent. A haggard Mexican jailer brought their meals, which were scarcely edible, and professed to be unable to comprehend their few garbled Spanish phrases. Otherwise, nobody visited them. They heard occasional noises in the street, but that was all. Only by the expenditure of what little money they had left could they prevail upon the jailer to procure them a length of clean cloth for rebandaging Weaver's arm.

A week went by in the same leaden fashion, and they began to wonder if their friends had deserted them. Even Rastignac was inclined to be doubtful whether he would be spared to exchange shots with Cust. But their release came as suddenly as their incarceration. It happened in the middle of the night, the eighth night of their tenure of the cell, when they were both asleep.

The door opened softly, and the light of a lantern shone over the threshold. De Rastignac, raising himself upon one elbow, was dazed to perceive the figure of the jailer, finger to lips, motioning them to rise.

"Señor Keet ees com'," the man whispered.

De Rastignac prodded Weaver awake.

"Do you mean we are to go with you?" he asked.

The Mexican nodded.

The Americans exchanged questioning glances.

"Do you suppose it's a trick?" asked Weaver.

"Very likely," agreed de Rastignac. "It sounds like Cust. And come to think of it, I've heard the Mexicans lure their people to the firing-squad in this way."

"Well, there's no use in resisting," said Weaver hopelessly. "If they want us outside, they'll get us outside."

De Rastignac silently crossed the cell to the doorway and peered over the jailer's shoulder.

"Nobody else around," he said. "Come on: let's chance it."

The Mexican pattered ahead of them along the dingy corridor, where an ancient hanging-lantern burned feebly. The ponderous door to the street was ajar, and he shoved this back so that they could pass out.

Two men slid as quietly as panthers from the *calabozo's* shadow.

"No time to talk now," muttered Jud Timmons' voice.

"We'll do a heap of talkin' yet, boys," added the other man, and Weaver started as he recognized the easy drawl.

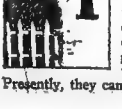
"Mr. Carson!"

"Sho', young feller," whispered Carson, chuckling, "don't be so all-fired free with a man's name. Thisyere's a shootin' offense."

He and Jud set off at a fast walk, keeping close to the housewalls, and making sure there was nobody in sight before they crossed an open space.

"The Mexican is trailing us," warned de Rastignac.

"That's all right," Carson answered. "He's wuss off 'n any of us. We got horses 'n ev'rything ready for you, and when we git to the corral we'll talk turkey. Pull yore foot!"



IT WAS evident that they were not bound for Harrison's corral, for they left the Plaza on their right and traversed a belt of truck gardens where houses were widely separated. Presently, they came to a gate in a 'dobe-

wall and heard ponies nickering and the stamping of restless hoofs.

"Lucian Maxwell's place," Jud remarked as he knocked twice rapidly, and after an interval, knocked again once. "K. fotched the horses out here after dark so's we could git away without wakin' Don Manuel."

"You boys shore have raised yore shares of hell in these parts," pronounced Carson. "But I mought have knowed it after seein' you in action in St. Louis."

The gate creaked open in their faces.

"Did you bring 'em with you?" inquired Harrison.

"Got the two boys and Pancho," returned Carson. "Now, Jud, you and K. look to the packs, and bring me the buckskins and guns and fixin's. I'll do what talkin' has to be done."

He beckoned his charges into a leanto by the gate; a candle, guttering in the nightwind, illumined faintly his flat face and stocky figure.

"S'prised you, didn't we?" he continued. "Fust off, we aimed to saw through the bars and git you out the window. Then we recollected Weaver's hurt arm, and reckoned we wouldn't chance that. Pancho here—" he jerked a thumb toward the Mexican jailer who stood silently at his elbow—"figgers I saved his ha'ar oncet when the Utes wore after him, and he allowed he wore willin' to let you out by the door, if I got him a new job with Will Bent, which I'm contracted to do. But he's goin' to ride south with you and Jud——"

"Hold on," interrupted Weaver. "You say we're to ride south with Jud? I don't want Jud to risk himself with us; and riding south would be riding farther into Mexico."

Carson nodded placidly.

"As for Jud, it wore his own idea, and when you want to cover yore trail the best way to do it is to head the way t'other feller won't suspect. The last thing Armijo will be lookin' for is yore ridin' south."

"That's very true," agreed de Rastignac. "We can turn off into Texas. But it's not at all necessary for Jud to go with us. We can——"

"Oh, no, you cain't," put in Jud, himself. "Here, boys, git out of them buggy clothes, and try theseyere buckskins. We're goin' to make reg-lar mountain men out of you. Tell 'em the plan, Kit?"

"Gimme a chance."

"Say Cust to 'em, and that'll be enough," advised Jud.

Both Weaver and de Rastignac ceased removing their prison clothes and turned on their rescuers with a stimulated interest which brought smiles to the faces of the frontiersmen.

"What about Cust?" demanded the Southerner.

"He's gone south," answered Carson. "Headin' for El Paso and Chihuahua."

"He wore skeered to stop any longer, boys, and that's the truth," interjected Harrison, depositing an armload of rifles, pouches, pistols and riding-gear. "He told Armijo he knowed one of us would git him. Why, Don Manuel had a guard with him all the time until he left town!"

De Rastignac's hand closed lovingly upon one of the revolvers Harrison had dropped on the rough table.

"I shall be quite content to have suffered any hardships, providing I can have one shot at that noisome individual," he said, balancing the cumbersome weapon.

"I'd surely like to punish him," Weaver added, with a vindictiveness strange to his character. "He deserves it. Thanks to him, Mr. Carson, my friend and I are ruined. And Mr. Harrison and all the independents in the train have been injured, more or less."

"Jest so," assented Carson. "We're all agin Cust. Now, here's the plan, Weaver. You boys, as you say, are ruined. Cust done you dirt, and Armijo played a skin-game on you. I told the gov'nor as much —only in Spanish, which is mebbe a leetle politer; and I reckon he's goin' to be sorry for it yet. I've got friends in New Mexico, and thar's allus a faction anxious to git in power. Armijo is beginnin' to wonder if he tried to grab off more'n wore good for him. So I don't reckon he's goin' to take after you two very hard. He'll send a patrol to the Gallinas mebbe, but he won't press 'em. Later on, when Carlos Beaubien and Lucian Maxwell and Antonia Sena and other *ricos* start a-raisin' Cain, and askin' if he's allus goin' to be hog-hungry, why, he'll be a lot more uncomfortable than he is now.

"But this ain't what we're concerned with tonight. Tonight, if you'll listen to me and Jud and K., you'll light out after Señor Ramon and take back them four wagons, which are really yore'n. Hull-sale gamblin' agin the decree fiscal! That's another thing I told Don Manuel some home-truths about.

"What d'you think of it, boys? Thar's you two, 'n Jud 'n Pancho. That's four men to manage four wagons. It kin be

done—if the Apaches leave you alone, and for that you kin only trust in the Lord and Jud Timmons. The wagons'll be wuth twenty thousand dollars any place this side of Chihuahua. Señor Ramon packed 'em with the pick of his goods and what he was able to squeeze out of the rest of you. A good bit of it's contraband, passed in under Armijo's influence."

"How many men has he with him, Mr. Carson?" asked de Rastignac.

"Only eight, and all greasers. Ain't that so, K.?"

"Yes," replied Harrison. "You four kin skeer 'em easy, if you work it right. Leave it to Jud, boys. He's same as an Injun thataway."

"Modesty's a virtue I ain't got no use for," remarked Jud, "so I'll go on and say K. is dead-right. We kin 'bush Señor Ramon, not a doubt of it. He's got five days start of us, but his wagons aren't good for more'n fifteen mile a day, and we kin make thirty and forty without lettin' ourselves out. We'd oughter be up with him inside of five days, most likely four."

"I have no quarrel to find with the plan," said de Rastignac; "and I am inclined to agree that we shall have no difficulty in handling Cust and his men. But if they were twice as numerous, I should still be disposed to pursue them. The fellow has annoyed me, and I propose to call him to account for it."

"Sounds reasonable," commented Carson. "I take it yo're fixin' to push lead into him?"

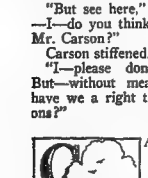
"Precisely, sir."

Weaver had been struggling into a buckskin shirt with the aid of Jud; the New Yorker's wounded arm was still sore and awkward.

"But see here," he said hesitatingly, "I—I—do you think this is entirely honest, Mr. Carson?"

Carson stiffened.

"I—please don't misunderstand me! But—without meaning to offend you—have we a *right* to take those four wagons?"



CARSON stared at him a moment, then commenced to laugh in silent abandonment.

"Great Jerushy!" exclaimed the mountain man at last. "Did you hear to that, K.? Hey, Jud, did you hear what I heerd? Has he a *right* to take those four wagons?"

Both Jud and Harrison joined in Carson's mirth.

"Say, boy, didn't you win four wagons off of Cust?" demanded Harrison.

"Yes, but——"

"Whar's the but come in, I want to know?" queried Jud. "You won 'em, didn't you? All fair and plain?"

"But the governor took them, not Cust," defended Weaver.

The merriment of the three frontiersmen was turned to pity.

"Honest, did you think Don Manuel meant all that bunk?" asked Jud.

"Say, Weaver, them wagons of yore'n wore all hauled into Cust's corral that night, oxen, wagons and goods out of the Custom House." Harrison exclaimed. "He sold the wagons to a teamster out Las Vegas way, and the goods he split up as convenient."

"And I heerd today Don Manuel told one of the Senas he couldn't afford to release you till yore goods had all been disposed of," Carson added. "The hull business wore a steal, Weaver."

"Bible words," claimed Jud. "Cust sent Little Pete to knife you fust, 'cause if you wore dead, why, nach'rally you wouldn't have no claim on the wagons you'd won. And, to be sartin sure, he fixed it up with the gov'nor to arrest you for evadin' the decree fiscal, like Don Augustin read it out to you. But I don't believe Don Manuel knowed aforehand Cust was goin' to send Pete after you."

"What does it matter whether he did or not?" queried Carson. "This night ain't goin' to run twenty-four hours. If these fellers are to cut south they've got to git goin' right soon. What do you say, you two? We cain't make you do what you don't——"

"Personally," said de Rastignac, "I am unable to see anything dishonorable in the enterprise you propose, sir."

"What you tell us puts a different face on the matter," admitted Weaver, "but I still don't see what use four wagonloads of goods will be to us. Can we take them to Texas?"

"Lord, no!" snorted Carson. "You'll git Cust's papers, if you act sensible, and Jud speaks Spanish, so you kin jest go on for El Paso or Chihuahua or wherever yore stuff has a market. Sell it; you won't have no difficulty; it'll be the only train to go south from Santey Fee. Then strike north through the mountains, come down to Touse and we'll see you safe for Bent's Fort."

"I wisht I had yore chance, young fellers," Harrison spoke up. "Yo're goin' to clean up big afore yore through."

"Yes, but we won't be able to come to Santa Fe again," said Weaver shrewdly.

"Now, I wouldn't be too sure about that-air," remonstrated Carson. "A man with money, Weaver, he swings a bigger club in New Mexico than a couple of greenhorns, flat-busted. 'N what's more, I hope you fellers are goin' to polish off Cust. If you do, things'll be a durned sight diff'rent 'round here next year."

Jud strode to the leanto's door.

"Fotch up them horses," he called. "We're ridin', boys."

"We are," affirmed Weaver. "And I can't thank you enough, Mr. Carson, You——"

"Sho'," objected the mountain man. "Debt's all on my side yet. All yore trouble come from takin' Addie away from Cust. When you do for him yo're workin' for me, boys. Yes, yo're workin' for all decent Americans. I've knowed a leetle rock start a hull mountainside to slidin', and mebbe, afore this is over, we'll have the Santey Fee trade back whar' it used to be."

HALF a dozen of Harrison's teamsters shook hands with the released prisoners as they mounted, and offered hoarse congratulations. K. himself, bade them forget the past, and concentrate on their present errand.

"And don't you worry none about the colonel and Marcellin, Weaver," he said. "When they hear what you done they'll give you all the time in creation to pay up. I'll tell 'em, if you don't git to St. Louis afore spring."

The gate of the yard was opened stealthily, and the four fugitives passed out into the dusty travesty of a road. Jud and Pancho rode in advance, each leading a pack-pony; Weaver and de Rastignac kept their horses' noses close to the pack-ponies' tails.

"Good luck to you, Harv!" the gruff voices called after them. "Keep yore gun-hand stiddy, Rasteenack."

"Ride for all yore wuth, boys"; Carson gave parting advice, "no time for the trapper's rack. Keep yore critter's sweatin' till Santey Fee's out of reach."

The voices died away; they heard a thud as the gate slammed shut. A house showed on their left; they passed it at a gallop, and gained the open country. Faster, and ever faster! Hoofs drumming a *rat-atat-tat*, horses panting and blowing. The mountains were hulking shadows against the frosty sky, all atwinkle with stars; the moon had set hours ago. The town they had left was a mere huddle of rectangular mud-heaps, with here and there a candle-flame like a pin-point in the overwhelming darkness. It was still, except for the barking of dogs and the wind rustling in the roadside trees.

Dawn found them twelve miles south, and Jud consented to a halt to rest the horses and give his proteges time for the best meal they had eaten since their arrest. But within the hour they were in saddle again, their horses pushed at a lope into the frowning mountains which covered this grim wilderness country. At long intervals they sighted a lonely *rancho* up in the foothills or a sheep herder's hut. Once they traversed a group of mud-hovels that might be called a village. But the occasional Mexicans they encountered gave this group of buckskin-clad riders a wide berth. To the simple peons the mountain men were beings of incredible ferocity and fiendish courage, almost as much to be dreaded as Apaches or Comanches.

The fugitives made forty-five miles that day, and pitched camp in a cottonwood grove some distance off the trail—this for two reasons: to better conceal themselves from any passing Mexicans, and in accordance with an old frontier rule, which required small parties never to camp by a main-traveled trail, because of the greater danger of an Indian attack. But the night was uneventful, and the following day they added nearly forty miles to their total, traveling from sunrise until an hour after sunset.

This, the second night, Jud ventured to spend in a roadside tavern, giving out to the Mexicans that he and his friends were trappers, intending to work west along the "Heelay" (Gila) during the winter. Few Mexicans could ever be persuaded to try the rough life of a trapper, but Jud's audience at Santa Rosa de los Mimbres were in no wise surprised that four *Americanos* should be intending to plunge into the stronghold of the Mohaves with winter at hand. It was exactly the sort of thing *Americanos* would do.

When they left the tavern in the morning, Jud decreed a more moderate pace.

"The way I figger it, boys," he said, "Señor Ramon is that far ahead of us that if we keep to this gait we'll overhaul him

in the middle of a water scrape whar that's a long day's journey acrost a dry country in a loop of the Rio Bravo. It's 'bout a day's ride from here. Now, I'd jest as soon he had the trouble of gittin' his teams through thatair *jornada;* and besides, thar ain't no more houses after the water scrape, not a durn house from thar to El Paso. 'Tain't likely thar'll be any parties on the trail neither, as late as this, so, if we wait until he's passed the water scrape, we're purty sartin to be able to give him his needin's without any incriminatin' witnesses. What say?"

There was no opposition to this policy, so they covered only thirty-five miles the third day; but the fourth day they were up two hours before dawn, filled all receptacles with water, gave their beasts all they would drink, and set out with the knowledge that they must ride fifty miles to reach water again. It was actually ten miles from the site of their night's camp to the rim of the desert stretch, and they could have watered at any one of several springs along this last ten miles; but for forty miles, which Cust, with his mule-teams must traverse inside of twenty-four hours, there was not a drop to be had.

Under Jud's skillful direction they traversed the *jornada* in thirteen hours, profiting by the fact that the lateness of the season had deprived the sun of the staggering heat, which in summer beat down upon the bare rocks and sandy wastes. But notwithstanding this favorable circumstance, they found the experience fully as dismaying as the passage of the Cimarron Desert on the Santa Fe Trail. The gaunt barrenness of the country, as if it had been killed, blasted of life; the lack of vegetation; the dryness of everything; the wreckage along the way, to the Easterners conveyed a sense of hostility, of physical menace, that was terrifying.

The trickle of water which was their goal, with the fringe of greenery around its edges, was as welcome as fortune itself, notwithstanding the frost in the air, the snow on the mountain tops and the cold wind which searched out every cranny in the brush shelter they threw up. But more welcome still were the indications that Cust had camped in the same spot as recently as that morning.

"We'll be up with him tomorrow, boys," asserted Jud. "Tell you what. I'll ride ahead about noon, and scout his trail, so's we won't be comin' on him suddenlike, without a chance to s'prise him. Then I'll aim to discover the best way to attack. You two and me have got to do all the real work. Pancho means well, but he'd turn tail if Señor Ramon give us a run for our money. Mebbe we'd oughter jump 'em while they're on the march. I dunno but what that's the answer. Wa'al, I'll figger it out later."

NIGHT'S sleep and the consciousness that they were close on the heels of their quarry put them all on their mettle. Pancho, who never spoke unless he was spoken to, and was content to perform all the chores of the camp, showed traces of a mingled excitement and fear, which warranted Jud's foreboding.

"Yes, cain't trust the greaser," said the trapper, eyeing him sidewise after they had resumed the trail. "Cain't blame him, noways, 'cause Cust's teamster'll recognize him, and he'll be thinkin' of all kinder things they'd say about him. He's skeered now he'll mebbe git trapped afore we kin reach Bent's Fort. Lord knows I don't blame him. Feel the same way, myself, most likely."

He changed abruptly to Spanish, and the Mexican's face brightened measureably.

"*Si, si,* Señor Jud," he said happily.

Jud grinned at his companions.

"Nothin' like a promise spoke in time," he remarked. "I jest told Pancho he better lie back with the pack-ponies, and not come up till we give him a hail. Now we can purty nigh rely on him not to bolt in the middle of the ruckus. 'Tain't much, but it's better'n nothin'."

They did not halt at noon, as they usually did, but ate whatever they carried in their haversacks, and presently Jud heeled his mount to a gallop, leaving the others to follow at a trot.

"You cain't miss the way," he called over his shoulder. "And if Injuns jump you, for God's sake, stand still fust-off and tell 'em yo're *Americanos.* They ain't so likely to make trouble for us folks as for Mexicans."

But Indians did not "jump" them, and two hours afterward the trapper reappeared.

"Hustle, boys," he cried when he was within earshot. "Cust's only a couple of miles ahead. *Pronto,* now! Give them ponies the quirt."

As he wheeled his horse into line he explained the plan of attack he had designed.

"We'd oughter catch him in a wooded canyon, if I remember my landmarks. We'll git right up on him without bein' seen. Give him a volley from cover, then charge with the six-shooters. Pancho kin lay back like I said, and kiver us when we charge."

Weaver, instinctively cautious, looked doubtful, but de Rastignac accepted the trapper's suggestion without question.

"My one fear is that the scoundrel will make off," said the Southerner.

Jud patted his rifle.

"Wa'al, in that case here's old Betsy. Tell you what, Henry, I'll make a deal with you. If we kin stop Cust so's you kin reach him with a handgun, he's yore meat. If it's long range work, why, old Betsy gits him. What say?"

De Rastignac bowed in his saddle.

"I should be reluctant to see another hand than mine punish the man, Jud; but it is no more than fair that you should have an opportunity, if it is impossible for me to settle my quarrel in gentlemanly fashion."

Jud grinned.

"'Gentlemanly fashion,' eh? Wa'al, now, what gentlemanly diff'rence is thar, I want to know, between killin' a houndawg with a pistol and a rifle? Either way he's dead—and either way the world's better. Sometimes I reckon I don't git yore meanin', Henry."

The Southerner flushed slightly.

"I thought I had made clear my desire to exchange shots with Cust," he said. "I am not accustomed to settling my quarrels by firing from ambush. That may be a proper means of taking justified vengeance, but it is not recognized by the code I know."

Weaver turned in his saddle; they were going at a fast clip, and the conversation was disjointed and breathless.

"Why must you insist upon trying to have a duel, Henri," he remonstrated, "when what we are after is to punish this man, and recover our goods? If he must be killed, let anybody kill him."

"We'll give you all Cust's greasers to shoot at, Harv, if you feel slighted," offered the trapper, grinning wider than ever.

"I hope it won't be necessary to injure one of them," retorted Weaver. "After all, we have no quarrel with them."

Jud sobered.

"Mebbe yo're right," he answered. "Cust's another *Americano*, jest like us. If we kill him not even Don Manuel is goin' to git awful hot over it. But a Mexican is a Mexican, and when an American kills one—whoop! Yes, sirree, Henry, Harv is right. Go slow on them Mexicans. If they fight back, drill 'em. If they git to runnin' shoot up their heels, but leave 'em hull. Matter of fact, all we want is Señor Ramon's scalp."

"I think we are more likely to lose our own," exclaimed Weaver bad-temperedly. "This strikes me as being a very foolhardy proceeding, four men—three, actually—attacking eight in the open."

"Foolhardy?" grunted Jud. "Humph! Mebbe so. But out here we don't reckon much of odds agin' greasers and Injuns. If they was Hudson Bay trappers, now! But hold up, boys. We got to take to the woods this side of that swell ahead. Git yore guns out.

The canyon—it was more of a shallow valley—was dotted with clumps of timber and high brush, densest on the verge of the slope which Jud had indicated. The three Americans, with Pancho dogging their heels, none too valiant of expression as he poised his gun across his saddle and led both pack-ponies at once, abandoned the trail for the protection of the trees, and regardless of scratching branches, forced their mounts up a steep ascent to a point which overlooked the far end of the canyon.

Toiling down the slope of the long swell were the four wagons, five mule teams to each and every mule backing his rump against the weighty loads, while the drivers cracked the bull-whips over their backs and assailed them with sibilant expletives that carried up the swell to the Americans' ears. Cust and three of his men rode horses; Cust was in the lead, the three Mexicans were scattered along beside the wagons, ready to help any team that got into difficulties.

"Shoot for their horses," said Jud. "That'll start 'em a-runnin'."

He leveled his own rifle across a tree-branch to steady it, and de Rastignac followed his example with entire equanimity; but Weaver experienced a sensation of repugnance. Shooting at Indians was one thing; shooting at white men, even though he intended to try not to injure them, was very different. So upset was he at the idea that he fired before either of the others and scored a ridiculous miss, his bullet spattering the dust in the road a hundred feet in front of Cust. But his shot had an extraordinary effect. The riders reined around and cried out at the puff

of smoke rising over the trees; the drivers pulled their teams across the slant of the trail to keep the wagons from skidding and reached for their weapons; Cust came galloping back to the rear to find out what it was all about.

IT WAS at that moment de Rastignac pressed his trigger. He missed his mark, one of the horses, and his bullet tore through a wagon-top, frightening the driver of that vehicle so badly that he jumped to the ground and pelted for the bush.

Jud fired a second afterward, and the horse of the nearest rider dropped as if it had been pole-axed, pitching the man head-first. The Mexican picked himself up, unhurt, but his eyes chanced to fall upon the driver who was scuttling for the bush, and, with his own experience in mind, he elected to run, too.

"Come on, boys," howled Jud. "That done it. We got two on 'em pullin' leather. Come on! Whoop! Whooppee!"

He urged his horse into the open, and Weaver and de Rastignac charged after him. Pancho, mindful of his instructions, fired over their heads; but the ex-jailer's shot was wider of the mark than Weaver's had been.

Cust was making frantic efforts to organize his remaining men for defense, and they delivered a scattering fire at the three riders in buckskin. He was a fair shot, himself, and sent a bullet through the brim of Jud's beaver hat. By this time, though, the Americans were able to bring their revolvers into play, and the rapidity of their fire literally paralyzed the Mexicans. De Rastignac killed a second horse, and the group about Cust seemed to blow apart. Men were running in all directions. Cust tarried only for a futile parting shot, and then, raking the flanks of his horse with his wheeled spurs, galloped south at a headlong gait.

"You and Harvey will have to make good the train, Jud," called de Rastignac. "I'm going after Cust."

"Hold up," answered the trapper, flinging himself from his horse. "I'll stop him for you. Remember our contract, eh? Wa'al, here's whar I make good on it. Bible words, Henry, Bible words! I'm goin' to fix it so's you kin kill him like a gentleman 'stead of a skunk—which same ain't good jedgment, boy, but ev'ry man works in his own way."

"It's long range even for the rifle," said the Southerner doubtfully.

"Oh, let him go," cried Weaver. "We have the wagons."

Jud regarded the New Yorker with quizzical disapproval.

"For a hard-headed feller, you do git some durned fool ideas, Harv," he declared. "How long d'you think we'd keep theseyere wagons if Cust was loose? Go on, Henry, take after him. He'll most likely try to make the bush after I bore his hoss."

De Rastignac nodded assent, and clapped his heels into his pony's ribs, pressing the weary beast to a lope. Looking back, he saw Jud leisurely sprawling on the roadside, rifle trained on the distant speck that was Cust. As he looked, the muzzle jetted a tongue of flame, and away down the road Cust's horse lurched, wavered and collapsed. A cheer from the trapper, and de Rastignac lashed his pony with the quirt. Cust scrambled to his feet, sought his rifle and started to run off the road; but the canyon walls hereabouts were steep and the bush-growth became sparse and stunted. There was not much chance of refuge close at hand. So he ran on down the trail, on the lookout for any avenue of escape.

But always at his heels thundered de Rastignac, riding closer and closer from moment to moment, pistol held erect in the right hand, body low in the saddle. Cursing to himself, Cust crouched behind a boulder and reloaded his rifle. He must settle this fellow who pursued him. The sooner the better. Perhaps later he might be able to rally his men and serve the other bushwhackers a dose of their own medicine. He thrust the rifle over the boulder, nestled the butt to his shoulder and drew a careful bead. What was it the man on the horse was yelling at him?

"Come out in the open, and stand up to my fire, sir!"

The man was a fool, Cust told himself with a secret grin. He'd wait until he couldn't miss, then bring him tumbling. Yes, too bad his teamsters had run so quickly. Well, they should have a flogging when he got his hands on them. In the meantime— Why, this man on the horse was one of the greenhorns in the *calaboso* at Santa Fé! Surely, he was that fire-eating Southerner, the Yankee, Weaver's, friend. How could he be here?

In his amazement, Cust raised himself

behind the boulder, disclosing his whole head and left shoulder, the better to make certain of his pursuer's identity. And de Rastignac, never tightening rein, whipped down his pistol and fired.

Cust leaped up convulsively, hands clawing at his throat, the red tide choking him.

"No—no—not—not——"

He was lying in an untidy heap when the Southerner dismounted beside him.

"Obviously, the fellow had no gentlemanly instincts," muttered de Rastignac. "Still, it is a pity he would not exchange shots on even terms. I am afraid he must have been cowardly. Humph! I must practise that snapshot in motion."

Weaver and Jud, riding up as soon as they had turned over custody of the wagons to Pancho, extended congratulations which he refused to accept.

"I am bound to say that I am disappointed in this affair," he explained. "I had hoped to induce Mr. Cust to meet me under the terms of the code, and——"

"And s'pose he'd killed you?" demanded Jud.

"Why, then, he would have been free to——"

"Not by a jugful of Touse lightnin'!" retorted the trapper. "Whar'd Harv and me come in by sech reasonin'? Henry, thar's times, like I done said afore, I kin suspect you of lackin' wits. If yo're goin' to kill a man, kill him. Don't go prancin' around a code. Thatair's for lawyers."

Harvey hastened to stave off a difference between the two.

"What does it matter, when Cust is dead? And anyhow, I'm sure Henri never thought of the mischance of Cust's escaping him. You see, Jud—" the New Yorker indulged in one of his rare smiles—"Henri's like you: he thinks he can't miss. And I reckon he's like you, too, because he *can't* miss."

XVI

FROM Cust Jud obtained a packet of papers, including manifests of the contents of the four wagons and a license from Governor Armijo authorizing the holder to trade freely anywhere in Mexico. There were also several drafts upon bankers in Chihuahua and St. Louis, besides a quantity of money. The trapper, whose attitude toward the transaction was distinctly unmoral, suggested that they take possession of the drafts and the money, as well as the contents of the wagons. But both Weaver and de Rastignac objected to such a proceeding.

"As for the drafts," the New Yorker pointed out, "they are useless to us unless we want to commit forgery, and endorse Cust's name on them. The money isn't ours; we haven't any claim upon it, and if we take it we shall be stealing."

Jud rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I'll 'low I'm ign'rant of thisyere trading business," he admitted, "and while I cain't see much diff'rence between takin' Señor Ramon's wagons and liftin' his moneybelt, I'm agreeable to bein' guided by a feller-like you, Harv, who's up on sich matters. But let me ask you this: what you goin' to do with the money, if we don't take it? Leave it here for the fust Apache that comes by to use for *pulque?*"

"No," decided Weaver. "I should say we had better take it with us, and at the earliest opportunity forward it to Governor Armijo. He was the same as Cust's partner, and I don't know of anybody else who might have a prior claim on it."

"Wa'al, now," exclaimed Jud admiringly, "thatair's a right brilliant scheme. I take off my hat to you, boy. That's one way to smooth down Don Manuel's feelin's. If I know him, he'll grab off ev'rythin' of Señor Ramon's he kin reach when he hears of this, and he'd oughter be kind of extry satisfied to have you help him make a clean sweep, as you mought say."

So they buried the drafts with Cust's body under a pile of boulders and started the wagons down the trail with enough of daylight remaining to carry them to a cottonwood grove by a creek, where there was grazing-ground for the mules and a more defendable position than they could have found in the canyon. They spent the night here, the Americans mounting guard by turns, for they were afraid Cust's Mexicans might be tempted to a reprisal; but their fears were groundless. The trail was deserted and the only travelers they met before they reached El Paso were a band of Jicarilla Apaches.

These Apaches gave no evidence of hostility; indeed, several of them recognized Jud and hailed him by name, asking for information of Carson and other famous mountain men and traders. But they were insistent in demanding a present, and were finally placated with Cust's rifle.

"I don't think they'd try to rush us," said Jud, after parting with their unwelcome trail-mates; "and if they did we mought make it purty warmish for 'em.

But you cain't never tell, boys. Some dark night, and a man's eyelids droopin'—whoosh! In they come, knives and hatchets swingin'. As 'tis, they're satisfied. But if they'd met Cust, 'stead of us! Say, mebbe them Mexicans we chased owe us their scalps."

At El Paso they were received without any especial manifestation of curiosity. To inquiries from local merchants Jud explained that Cust had been detained "up North," and inside of a week they disposed of goods equivalent to a wagonload for six thousand dollars. They had about made up their minds to continue on to Chihuahua—for they had to keep ahead of any rumors that might be cast abroad concerning their exploit—when one night, as they sat at supper in the quarters they had hired from a storekeeper, a big, blond-bearded man strolled in.

"Goot efening, Chud," he said with a pronounced German accent.

"Wa'al, if 'tain't Speyers!" exclaimed the trapper, offering his hand. "Come, eat with us, Speyers. Say, boys," to Weaver and de Rastignac, "thisyere's Mr. Albert Speyers. He's an old friend of mine, used to trade to Santey Fee, but now he mostly works into Old Mexico. Bein' a Prooshan, 'stead of an *Americano*, he kin go and come 'most like a greaser, eh, Speyers?"

The German smiled benevolent assent.

"They are not fery friendtly to your beoble, it is true," he assented. "It is the chealousy of an inferior race for a stronger. But how gomes it dot you trafel for Cust, Chud, as I hear dot you do?"

"Oh, Señor Ramon couldn't come South this fall," replied Jud carelessly, "so we come for him. How's trade?"

"Not so goodt here."

Jud nodded.

"Weaver, here, is our tradin' man," he said, "and that's his idea, too. We done purty well, but I reckon we got to move on."

"So it is I gome to you," said Speyers. "South in Chihuahua there is better trade, andt if you don't stop there too long you can go on to San Juan de los Lagos, where they haf the big fair in December. Dot is the blace to make money, my friendts. You don't got to pay the interstate tax, andt so you safe by dot alone what your goodts cost you."

"We don't aim to go so far," answered Jud. "We only got three wagonloads left, and I reckon we'd oughter be able to sell 'em in Chihuahua."

"If you don't blan to go to San Juan," suggested Speyers, "berabs you wouldt like to sell oudt to me? I hafe a needt for high-class goodts to take to the fair. What do you carry?" His eyes twinkled. "If you come from Señor Ramon I exbect you hafe much contraband."

"More'n a leetle," admitted Jud. "Clothes, shoes, boots, tobacco, two boxes of revolvers, Colt's patent——"

"Dot sounds bretty nice to me," interrupted the German. "Vot vill you sell to me for?"

"Wagons and teams?" queried Jud.

"*Ja*, eferyt'ing."

Jud scratched his head.

"Hadn't thought of it," he said. "What you fellers got to say?"

He appealed to Weaver and de Rastignac, who were as much at a loss as himself.

"Maybe Mr. Speyers would care to make us an offer," said the New Yorker.

"I gife you twelve thousand dollars for the t'ree wagons," Speyers responded promptly.

"It's not enough," said Weaver, his trading instinct alert. "We've sold a wagonload here for six thousand dollars and more—and that didn't include many high-priced goods."

"*Ja*, but you godt to estimate your freight south," argued Speyers; "andt the time I safe you."

"Those wagons are worth eighteen thousand dollars," insisted Weaver.

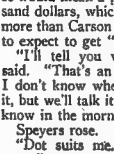
"I give you fifteen thousand dollars," offered Speyer.

Weaver firmly repressed his first tendency to close off-hand with the proposition. It would mean a price of twenty-one thousand dollars, which was a thousand dollars more than Carson had said they had a right to expect to get "this side of Chihuahua."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Speyers," he said. "That's an offer worth considering. I don't know whether we ought to accept it, but we'll talk it over tonight and let you know in the morning."

Speyers rose.

"Dot suits me. But I don't offer no more."



THE German was scarcely out of the door before Jud and de Rastignac fell upon the New Yorker.

"Boy, yo're plumb crazy," the trapper assured him. "I wouldn't wait a minute afore I closed with Speyers."

"Think, Harvey," pleaded the Southerner. "So far as I'm concerned, I haven't any interest in the business."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Weaver.

"Why, I lost my wagon to Cust."

"And I won it back again."

"Oh, no, you won three of Cust's wagons."

"Half of what I won is yours," snapped Weaver. "Or, rather, a third—beeause Jud cuts into this."

"Slow, boy, slow," exclaimed the trapper. "Yo're crazier'n ever. I ain't never had an interest in theseyere wagons. Not me! I'm jest guide to the train."

"Without you, Jud, we never could have managed this affair," replied Weaver; "and it's as ridiculous to suppose that you shouldn't have your share of the profits as Henri."

"We can argue all that later, Harvey," de Rastignac interfered again. "What matters now is that you shouldn't lose an opportunity to recoup your losses, pay your debts and still have a handsome profit. Take my advice, run after Speyers and close with him."

"Shore," amended Jud. "He mought fall and break his neck in the dark."

Weaver grinned quietly.

"He meant the fifteen thousand dollar offer, didn't he?"

"Not a doubt," answered the trapper. "Speyers's as squar' a man as thar is on the frontier."

"All right, then. He's safe to make good on it. In the meantime, we don't want to seem too anxious. Remember, we've got our reasons for playing safe."

Neither of the others could combat this argument, and they were glad they had not over-persuaded Weaver the next morning when the deal was closed.

"Now, aboudt terms," proposed the big German. "I gife you t'ree t'ousandt cash, andt a draft on St. Louis for der resdt. Is dot right?"

"Yes," said Weaver.

Speyers produced ink and paper.

"I make dot draft out to Cust, eh?" he questioned.

"No," Weaver exclaimed. "Make it out to me, Mr. Speyers—Harvey Weaver, care of Bent, St. Vrain & Company."

"Ho, you are anodder bartner of Cust's, eh?" smiled Speyers, dipping his pen. "You andt Armijo?"

"In this venture, yes."

Weaver squared his jaw, looking for trouble. But Speyers, after a moment's thought, merely nodded his head.

"If you deal mit Bent, St. Vrain & Company, dot is enough for me," he said. "You are all righdt, my friendt."

He scrawled the draft and handed it over, receiving in turn the manifests of the goods purchased, signed by Cust and countersigned by Weaver.

"Dot's fine," he commented. "In the morning I pull oudt for Chihuahua. Maybe so you vould like to gome mit me, eh, you t'ree?"

"Cain't do it, nohow, Speyers," answered Jud. "We got to git back north afore snow flies."

When the three rode out of El Paso that afternoon they took the Santa Fé Trail, but out of sight of the settlement they turned west, crossed the Rio Bravo and dived into the recesses of the Sierra Mimbres. Pancho, behind them, now led three pack-ponies, loaded with food supplies, ammunition, camping equipment and blankets. They had turned their backs upon civilization and were heading into a country where no white men lived, where the landfalls, the passes, the river courses were known only to trappers like Jud. Here they would be safe from any pursuit that had been set afoot—although perils of hostile savages, of precipices and of bitter cold awaited them.

XVII

THE party rode wide of the river, on Jud's advice, heading westward until the ridge of the Peloncillos loomed across the skyline. Then they swung north through Stein's Pass and, traversing a level upland, crossed the headwaters of the Gila and continued, with the Mogollons on their lefthand and the Black Range to the east. Here they were snowed in for five days, seeking refuge from the cold in a hut contrived by roofing over a gap between two immense rocks with cedars and making end walls in the same way. The horses were provided with a similar shelter.

From the source of the Gila, Jud held on toward the north, rounding the eastern flank of the Datil Mountains. They skirted the foothills of the Pinons and, after filling their waterskins, struck into the central desert, steering a course about midway of the pueblo of Acoma and the Zuni villages. They were as anxious to avoid

the settled Indians as the roving tribes; the former because they were likely to pass on information of the travelers to the Mexican authorities, the latter because of their propensity for white scalps. As a matter of fact, the only Indians they met on the whole journey were a wide-ranging band of Utes, who gave chase to them after they had passed the desert and were bearing west of the sprawling continuation of the San Juan Mountains, in search of the head of the Cruesca.

Fortunately, there was little snow on the ground at this time, and in a running fight the marksmanship of Jud and de Rastignac soon discouraged the Utes. Beyond the Cruesca, they turned east of north, following the west flank of the San Juans, pivoted east in the shadow of Gallinas Peak, and as Jud exultantly remarked, had "a clean gitaway for Touse."

On a sparkling December day, with patches of snow on the flanks of the Rockies, they rode by the high-piled pueblos of the Indian village and came to the Mexican settlement. Taos was as much American as Mexican, for here were come scores of trappers, mountain men, teamsters and adventurers, some looking for work, some hunting health, some after diversion in the shape of "Touse lightnin'," some—and Kit Carson amongst the number—making the settlement the base of their activities over mountains and prairies.

Carson greeted the newcomers with a manifestation of feeling he seldom permitted himself.

"Wa'al, now, you done it, boys!" he exclaimed as they dismounted in front of his 'dobe house. "That's fine. We done heerd from Santey Fee that some of Cust's men had come in with a wild yarn about his train bein' grabbed by a band of rarin' *Americanos*. Nobody ain't seed or heerd anything of Cust since——"

"Nobody will," interrupted Jud grimly.

"That's cheerful news," cried Carson. "Hear to that, fellers." He hailed the group of Americans who had gathered to inspect the travel-worn horsemen. "Señor Ramon has had his needin's. If I know as much as I think I do, Armijo is a-goin' to see a bright light shinin' in his eyes. But come inside, boys, you cain't stay long. Thisyere's still New Mexico, and thar's customs men at the other end of the street won't miss a chance to send word to the gov'nor soon's they larn yo're here."

Inside the house, safe from curious eavesdroppers, gravity claimed him.

"I'm sorry to have to say it," he told them; "but you better pull out tonight. You done so well it'd be a shame to stumble at the end of yore troubles. What'd you do with Cust's wagons?"

He slapped his thigh in silent applause at Weaver's answer.

"That's something like! Boys, I'm here to say yo're over the wust of it. You ride for Bent's Fort. George Bent is thar, if Will ain't, and you tell him I sent you. He knows about you, now. He'll make you comfortable till spring. Then, soon's anybody's ready to start east, you go back to Mizzoura and load up ag'in for Santey Fee."

"But what about Armijo?" asked Weaver. "Oh, yes, Mr. Carson, and I was forgetting that I have some money we took from Cust's body, which I think ought to go to the governor."

Carson whistled as he received the packet.

"That ain't a bad idea," he said. "Tell you what: I'll take this to Santey Fee next time I go—got to see about licenses for some of my trappers—and I'll give it to Don Manuel, and tell him it come from you, and you had it from Cust. That'll sort of put him in a good humor. He cain't prove any of you killed Cust. Of course, he'll hear in time that you sold Cust's goods in El Paso, probably has heerd it already; but nobody kin prove you didn't buy 'em off'n Cust.

"As for yore goin' back to Santey Fee next year, don't worry none about it. The gov'ment in Mexico City are beginnin' to believe Don Manuel has been linin' his own purse a leetle mite heavier'n he'd ought to, and I've got plenty of friends who are goin' to work on him through the winter. He's skeered right now.

"You jest pay him the full duties on yore wagons—don't worry, thar won't be none of this extry inspection and I doubt if the decree against retail business will last. To be shore of him, when yo're gittin' ready to catch up at Independence, you look around and pick up a likely pair of nags, high-steppers. Then, after you git to Santey Fee, you be shore the gov'nor has a look at 'em. Don't offer them to him, jest let him see 'em. He cain't keep his eyes off a hoss. And when he wants to bid on 'em—and if you pick out anything real fancy he's bound to try for 'em—you jest let him have 'em purty much on his own terms. That'll fix him."

"If you are certain, Mr. Carson," answered Weaver doubtfully. "We can't afford to risk confiscation again."

"Nonsense," said de Rastignac. "If necessary, Harvey, I shall call out the governor. He may not be a gentleman, as he admitted, but his office will require him to——"

"I dunno as I'd be too brash with Don Manuel, Rasteenack," Carson interrupted. "Anyway, 'tain't necessary to shoot him. When you done for Cust you made it possible for the Santey Fee trade to go on. Thar's no other American for Armijo to employ as agent. He'll most likely send out his brother Juan, but they'll work in a small way and the trade won't be affected none. No, you let the gov'nor be, and see if you cain't git as rich as Colonel Owens. Remember, that big d ,s are a-comin' soon. That feller Fremont I took out to the South Pass this summer is goin' clar to Oregon next year, and my guess is the men at Washington are blowin' up their spunk to grab off a new slice of the mountain country. Fust thing you know we'll be into war with Mexico—and God knows whar we'll stop, then. You'll mebbe have Californy opened to trade.

"Now, I've said enough. Draw on me for any stores you need, and don't stop goin' till yo're acrost the Arkansaw. The Injuns are all under cover, and you'd ought not to be interfered with after you leave here."

They thanked him profusely, and shortly after midday rode out of Taos, pointing northward again, the mighty wall of the Rockies barring the eastern sky. Several days later they crossed the Raton Range to the head of the Arkansas, and followed the river to Bent's Fort. It was eight days after leaving Taos that the high dun walls of the fort appeared above the leafless clumps of cottonwoods along the bank, with the Stars and Stripes floating from the sentry-box over the main gate. The loneliest place in the United States was Bent's Fort in those days, the farthest permanent outpost of American power, a rectangular mass of adobe walls, eighteen feet high and six feet thick, covering an area of one hundred and fifty by one hundred feet.

WEAVER and de Rastignac were conscious of a smarting in the eyes as the flag came into view. It seemed impossible to believe that they were back amongst their own kind. Even Jud hemmed and hawed.

"Does beat all how a mountain-rat likes me kin feel all cheered up at findin' fellers that use his own cuss-words," he remarked presently.

George Bent, who was in command of the fort, his other brothers being East for the winter, gave them as hearty a welcome as they could desire, and they celebrated Christmas a few days afterward with all the comforts of home: iced champagne—for the fort boasted an ice-house—and pumpkin pies made by Charlotte, the negress cook, who was regarded as the foremost culinary expert west of the Mississippi. And de Rastignac was made happy by the billiard-table in the headquarters building.

"The sport of a gentleman, billiards," he confided to Weaver. "I must teach you, Harvey. Some of these men play a rather fair game."

"Look here," said Weaver anxiously. "You aren't going to start gambling again?"

Ds Rastignac drew himself up proudly.

"My dear sir, aside from the bounty I have accepted at your hands because I realize the sincerity of the friendship which prompts it, I am entirely without funds, and I assure you I have no intention to use for the purpose you mention any moneys you have loaned me."

Weaver blew up.

"I've had all I want of this kind of talk!" he shouted. "We have twenty-one thousand dollars. There are three of us, not counting Pancho. I propose that we give him whatever Jud thinks will be appropriate, and divide the remainder. Otherwise, I won't take a cent."

Jud, who was lounging in the room, cleaning his rifle, perked up at this.

"What would I do with six or seven thousand dollars, boys? I ain't got a need for any sech amount. I'd jest go off on a bust that'd land me in every *calaboso* in this country'n Mexico. No, sirree, none of that for Jud Timmons. What I done, I done fust off 'cause Harv threw me in the river and then saved my bacon, and after that I got to takin' a fancy for both of you young fellers. As far's Señor Ramon's concerned, I threw in with you thar 'cause I was 'shamed of standin' by when he was tormentin' Kit's leetle gal. I'll be 'shamed of that to my dyin' day, and it shows the skunk thar is in ev'ry man when he's likkered up. Boys, as near as I kin figger, I owe you money for givin' me the chance to respect myself."

"Why, Jud, I'm sorry you feel that

way," said Weaver slowly. "You see, I'd hoped that we'd hang together, we three. You know the ropes better than we do. Henri's a good mixer, and I know trade. And between us we'd make a good team."

"Nonsense," protested de Rastignac. "I am more of a liability than an asset, Harvey."

"If you backed out of the partnership, I'd give up afid go back to New York," said Weaver simply.

Jud was peering into his rifle-barrel.

"Them words mean a lot to me, Harv," he remarked. "But I ain't the kind that'll settle down to business. I don't mind a roof over my head now and then; but, speakin' largely, I aim to keep outdoors. The mountains for me. Tell you what, I'll make a deal with you. We'll all go back East in the spring, and I'll stay with you to Santey Fee—in case Don Manuel does try to act up mean. After that, we'll have to trust to our own medicines."

All that Weaver and de Rastignac could say would not budge him from his determination. But the argument did bear fruit in a partnership agreement Weaver drew up, by the terms of which he and de Rastignac were to share equally in any profits accruing from their trading ventures in the future. They gave Jud a credit of one thousand dollars with George Bent, and presented Pancho with one hundred dollars and a new gun. The funds remaining, less Weaver's debts to Colonel Owens and Bent, St. Vrain & Company, were to constitute the capital of the firm of Weaver & de Rastignac.

XX

THE firm of Weaver, de Rastignac & Company had a very successful career until the year of the Mexican War. De Rastignac, who had begun to chafe against the confinements imposed upon a wealthy merchant, dropped out at the first tidings of Taylor's advance, and secured a commission in Yell's Arkansas Mounted Rifles; he led a battalion at Buena Vista, and when he returned from Mexico his father became reconciled to him and insisted that he should resume his life on the family's Louisiana plantation. In the succeeding decade he became one of the most famous gamblers in the Mississippi Valley, and won and lost three fortunes, according to the popular story. He died, a colonel of the Confederacy, at the siege of Vicksburg.

Weaver, however, became a dyed-in-the-wool New Mexican. He continued the old trade under the firm name of Weaver & de Rastignac until the middle '50's, when he went into sheep-ranching on a large scale. He was a member of the Territorial legislature, a company commander under Carson in the First New Mexican Volunteer Cavalry during the Civil War, and did his share in the campaigning that held the Southwest country for the Union. He was at 'Dobe Walls and Valverde, and in the latter battle received a Minie ball in the leg. But he lived to see the day when Fred Harvey restaurants dotted the iron rails that paralleled the old Santa Fé trail, a day when the Apaches were all dead or on reservations—and when the frontier was only a glorious memory in men's minds.

As for Jud, of his end all that is known is that he went out trapping one winter early in the '70's and never came back.

"Thisyere country's gittin' too all-fired crowded for me," he said the last time Weaver saw him.

"That's what Daniel Boone said about Missouri before you were born," the New Yorker answered.

"Reckon Dan'el knowed what he wore talkin' about," growled Jud. "Most of the fellers I trapped and scouted with are gone. Carson, Beckwourth, Owens, the Bents, Beaubien. The buff'lo are goin' fast. Next, the Injuns'll go. Thar's moughty leetle fur to be had for the takin' already. I kin see the day a-comin' I'll have to git me a job herdin' sheep for you, Harv, or go shootin' meat for the Army. Why, boy, thar's wimmin and babies whar you'n me'n Henry used to watch out for Pawnees and lay for buff'lo! Fust thing you know, they'll be farmin' in Kansas."

THE SIX NATIONS

IN THE history of Colonial times we find frequent reference to the Five Nations, then to the Six Nations, of Iroquois. The reason for this was that in 1722 the related Tuscarora tribe, which had lived in North Carolina, but gradually migrated northward, was admitted to the Iroquois league, which thenceforward consisted of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora tribes.—F. W. H.

SHOULD INDIAN RITES BE PRESERVED

By F. W. HODGE

Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

THERE has never been a time when the question of Indian rites and ceremonies, which so often are associated with or find expression in the dance, has been the subject of such lively discussion as during the last year or two. The revival of interest in the subject was due largely to a communication addressed "To all Indians" on March 28, 1923, by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in which, after setting forth the alleged baneful effect of certain native celebrations he asked the Indians "to hold no gatherings in the months when the seed-time, cultivation of crops and the harvest need your attention and at other times to meet for only a short period and have no drugs, intoxicants, or gambling, and no dancing that the superintendent does not approve." Thus putting the Indians on their good behavior for a year, the commissioner threatened them with "some other course" if the reports did not show that his request had been heeded.

The commissioner has consistently denied that his letter was an "order," so let us call it a mere threat—with fangs. The fact remains, however, that the Indians of no tribe were permitted to dance without the approval of their superintendent, which meant that they were prohibited from conducting any religious rite of which dancing was a part, that did not meet the favor of their official all-highest, whose ability to discriminate with intelligence is not derived from experience as an executive or a teacher, as one might suppose, but usually from the fact that he received his appointment through political preferment. Of course, there are notable exceptions; but I have heard one Indian school superintendent say, "I jest can't learn them boys nothing." Yet he is one of those on whose discretion, not to say his personal religious views, the Indians must rely for the performance of their age-old religious customs.

As everyone knows, there are tribes so widely distinctive in language and culture and traits that what may be applicable to one would no more pertain to another than to the Hottentots or the Samoans. And yet the "recommendation" of the commissioner was addressed "To all Indians" and the superintendents were endowed with unlimited power regardless of the kind of rites these First Americans are wont to perform.

There is little wonder, then, that the commissioner's communication was met with thunderous protests throughout the land by those who see the personification of modesty and other virtues in the Indian ceremonies rather than find them to be what certain critics condemn as perform-

ances so disgusting as to be unprintable, although admitting that their charges are based wholly on hearsay.

In times long past some of the Indians practised certain religious rites that would be repellent to our present sensitive nature. Such, to mention a couple of examples, was the sacrifice of a captive maiden by the Pawnees to the Morning Star, and the ancient blood sacrifice by the Aztecs of youths and maidens to their deities at a time when more civilized peoples were inflicting the law of torture on their victims in the name of the Prince of Peace. But with the Indians, as with us, these are things of the past. The much-vaunted Sun Dance performed by tribes of the Plains until recent years was often accompanied with self-torture by certain votaries; but this was a strictly personal and optional adjunct, and never an inherent part of the rite, although the commissioner of Indian affairs refers to it as if a general and current practice.

The Snake Dance of the gentle Hopi Pueblos of Arizona, whose very name signifies "Peaceful People," was mentioned by the commissioner as if especially abhorrent. "It is not right to torture your bodies or to handle poisonous snakes in your ceremonies," he says. But did any one ever hear of a Hopi being killed by the venom of a serpent in this fantastic prayer for rain? If the Hopi believes that dancing with snakes will induce the clouds to give forth their bounty and his scanty crops thereby made to keep the wolf from the door the following winter while his children are away to school learning to dance in the way of white people, then, in the name of all his gods, let him do so!

The Constitution provides that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. If the Indians desire to express their religious beliefs in the way of their ancestors by means of rites and ceremonies instituted centuries ago, then they should be permitted to do so, the assumed plenary authority of our Indian Service to the contrary notwithstanding.

Sometimes Indians spend much time away from home while dances are in progress, to the neglect of their crops and stock, it is said. But this lapse is so exceptional, when all the Indians are considered, that to apply a rule which so obviously had as its ultimate object the abolishment of all Indian ceremonies would hardly be in the interest of justice or reason.

The Pueblo Indians, for example, who have been singled out especially by those who would abolish everything aboriginal that the Indians possess, are industrious, self-sustaining, asking nothing but protection from grafters and fools. If they spend much time in their forms of worship, they more than compensate the loss by overtime labor. The Pueblo farmer who does not perform the better part of a day's work before his superintendent tumbles out of bed each morning is looked upon as a drone indeed.

There are many Indian tribes whose ceremonies are as dramatically religious and as spiritualy beautiful as those of Oberammergau, while the abiding faith in their efficacy is not exceeded by that of the followers of any other cult. Of course their rites are not Christian, but as Congress is prohibited from establishing any form of religion, the legal status of the rites of the Indians is the same as that respecting the usages of any other faith. Therefore, one may ask, by what token do we threaten the Indians with dire vengeance if they do not practise their religion in accordance with our notions?

There are many Indian ceremonies which even the most fanatical of the critics has admitted to be enjoyable, for he participated in one of them himself, and even confesses that "some of the 'secret dances' are entirely harmless." But no greater harm could be done the Indians than the fabrications that have been circulated during recent months, chiefly by well-meaning but misinformed people, in regard to certain alleged obscene performances by the Pueblos of New Mexico, not one of which had been witnessed by the complainants.

I have observed numerous Pueblo ceremonies, some of them extending at intervals over many days, at times being performed in the open, at other times taking place at night in houses set aside for the purpose. Many of these drama-rites are allegorical, in which the genesis of the people according to deep-seated tribal belief, and the beneficence of various sacred personages from the beginning of time, are dramatized in dance and song by performers, often masked, who assume the spiritual quality of the mythic characters (though not mythic to them) with such fervor that their individuality is completely lost. Indeed, so thoroughly imbued with this religious spirit are these impersonators that time and again their eyes have met my own without a gleam of recognition, although we were on terms of intimate friendship. Never on any of these occa-

sions have I witnessed anything but a manifestation of the deepest spirituality and a sincerity of purpose that one finds only rarely among the most devout of our own kind.

The Pueblos live in a semi-arid land and gain their livelihood chiefly by tillage with the aid of irrigation which they have carried on in much the same way since prehistoric times. It is not unnatural, therefore, that a people so dependent on rainfall should have developed what we may call a water cult, centered in which is a cycle of rites whose main object is to produce rain. For a primitive community living in such an environment nothing would seem to be more suited to their needs than a religion in which they have a boundless, outstanding faith, and which to them serves every beneficent purpose. Truly, nothing could be more foreign to the charge of lasciviousness than the lives of the old native priests in whose gentle hearts reposes the welfare of their fellow tribesmen, and who, by virtue of their sacred offices, practise a self-denial and uphold a moral code that should put to blush the very whites who condemn them.

The hubbub raised by certain fanatics when some of the Pueblos insisted last summer on instructing some of their boys in the tribal history and the ancient rites that they might be perpetuated to the glory of their deities and for the commonweal, even to the extent of sacrificing a few days of Government school education each year in printing, tailoring, plumbing and similar edifying but useless occupations, will be appreciated by the reader without further comment.

If, in the performance of any of their dances—many of which, of no religious significance, are given at the behest and for the entertainment of whites—any of our Indians should overstep the proprieties as codified by the supersensitive, such as appearing with legs and torso bared, let the shocked hie away to one of our present-day theaters and feast his eyes and soothe his soul on something really civilized, leaving the red man to the awful fate that awaits him for decently girding his loins and bedecking himself for a dance which would test the breath and endurance of any white man beyond the point of exhaustion.

A FATAL INDIAN BALL GAME

IT WAS during the so-called conspiracy of Pontiac, that remarkable Ottawa leader, that a considerable body of the allied Indians gathered at Fort Mackinaw, Michigan, in June, 1763, where, by a ruse that may be regarded as one of the most notable events in Indian warfare, they succeeded in capturing the palisaded post and in almost obliterating its defenders.

The houses and barracks of Mackinaw were arranged in a quadrangle enclosing a large area on which all the doors opened, while behind was a palisade which made the post well-nigh impregnable to Indian assault by any ordinary method. But the British had not counted on Indian strategy, for when, early in the morning of June 4, a party of the Ojibwa went to the fort and invited the officers to attend a grand ball game to be played with the Sauk, the post was soon deserted by half of its occupants. The gates were wide open, and soldiers, mostly without arms, were gathered in groups under the shadow of the palisade watching the exciting contest. Mingled among them were a large number of Canadians, while a multitude of Indian women, wrapped in blankets, were conspicuous in the crowd, and Indian chiefs and warriors were scattered among the spectators, seemingly intent only on the game and its outcome. The level open ground was covered by the ball-players, each side wildly struggling to defend its goal, yelling and shouting, rushing and striking, tripping their adversaries or hurling them to the ground, each agile player bent on creating as much excitement as possible among the onlookers.

Suddenly the ball soared into the air, and descending in a wide curve, fell near the pickets of the fort. Then, as if in pursuit of the ball, the players turned and came rushing, a maddened and tumultuous throng, toward the gate. The amazed British had no time to think or act as the shrill cries of the ball-players were turned into the ferocious war-whoop. The warriors snatched from the women the tomahawks concealed under their blankets, and in less time than it takes to recount the tragedy, all was carnage and confusion, the garrison being killed almost without mercy.

Captain Etherington, Lieutenant Leslie, and eleven men were saved from torture by the Ottawa, and Alexander Henry, the trader, narrowly escaped the same fate largely through the efforts of a captive Indian woman, who secreted him in a garret from which he witnessed the onslaught.—F. W. H.

NORTHWEST OF THE LAW

By JOHN M. OSKISON

A frontier all its own was this wild section into which had drifted the indolent ex-cowboys and their families; but, as to all frontiers, at last the Law came to Plum Creek bottoms

KAFF LITTLE leaned out over the sun-blistered door of the family "whoopie" to make himself heard above the clatter of its engines.

"Say, ma, I sure hate to go mixin' into ol' Ham's affairs this way!" It was evidently a last protest, with which his wife patiently sympathized.

"I know," she agreed, then stepped back from the little car. "I'd get-goin' if I was you!"

"That's right," Kaff admitted. "Well, I'll be back some time!"

He stepped on the gas and sent the whoopie trundling into the highway that led along zigzag section lines to Plum Creek and Ham Jenkins' farm.

As he drove, with apparent carelessness and a roving eye for the fat beauty of the crisp, golden autumn of northern Oklahoma, his practical mind was occupied with a disturbing mixture of reminiscence, regret and dread. Progressively as he rattled over the twenty-two miles from his big upland farm to Ham's weedy little place in Plum Creek bottom, both the road and its bordering fields grew more unkempt. Despite the tingling lift of a mellow October afternoon his mood darkened.

He was headed for a human backwater, a settlement of adventurous minded, shiftless men, hostile to sober and orderly progress, of silent, scornful, drab women, who turned solicitors for rural telephone lines away with a stony stare and an uncompromising "No!" In the Plum Creek fields, rank horseweed, cockleburs and crap grass flourished, starving the crops. Vile, rutted roads were the rule. Mortgages, taken by shark money lenders, blanketed the settlement. Their signers laughed mirthlessly at threats of foreclosure and winked as they promised to meet overdue interest payments.

Outside the borders of their fields, however, the Plum Creek folks had their satisfactions. In the rich bottom land grew a varied harvest of nature: laden plum thickets; shaded paw-paw groves yielding fat, luscious, fist-sized fruit, great climbing vines, now heavy with clusters of tart wild grapes; numerous sturdy walnut, hickory and pecan trees bore prodigally. On the sun-warmed slopes beyond the edges of the timber and in converging ravines grew spreading groves of trim little persimmon trees and fringes of black haw bushes. Wild strawberries, May apples, and blackberry tangles tempted pail-carrying women and girls in summer. Along the timber edges, quails, rabbits and scattering flocks of prairie chickens held their own against dogs and guns; and in the deeper woods gray and red squirrels multiplied, 'possums could be treed and

"flashed" and an occasional wild turkey fell to the aim of an excited hunter.

These Plum Creek woods concealed a source of wealth, too, a harvest that was little talked of but reaped with adventurous zeal, the wildcat distilling of raw corn liquor.

Those who scratched the small, carelessly fenced fields and spent long night hours bending over copper kettles in isolated brush patches seemed to be as weedy as their neglected acres; yet they were distinguished by a surprising alertness of eye, as well as a quick, responsive humor.

Naming the families within a five-mile radius of Ham Jenkins and running back their history, Kaff Little was able to account for them and the half wild state in which they lived. Twenty-six years ago, when he and Ham Jenkins had lost their jobs as cowpunchers because the old open range had disappeared, they had decided to settle down to farming. Ham had married Violet Cannon, of militant Missouri Mormon stock, buying the lease of a clearing and a cabin on Plum Creek. Little had chosen to remain on the high upland and take to wife Betty Gourd, who brought him, along with her quarter strain of Indian blood and a quiet competence as partner, the right to fence and farm as much unoccupied tribal land as he wanted to tackle.

Later came the break-up of the Indian government and the allotment of communal holdings; definitely, the old era of ranching passed. One by one other cowboys married and became reluctant farmers. Most of them followed Ham Jenkins to Plum Creek, rather than Little to the wind-swept prairie; life was easier and pleasanter on Plum Creek.

"Boys, you can build in the shelter of the timber an' keep warm in winter; the soil's better; an' there's good huntin'," Ham sang its praises.

They had listened and believed; and, largely because they had little worry about today's supper and tomorrow's dinner, they fell into the ways of the shiftless and wasted much breath in bemoaning the days of their past glory. They went through the motions of farming, but in spirit they remained true to the brotherhood of the embroidered boot-top and the memory of the "Whoop-ee, git-along-little-dogie!" generation.

By contrast, Little and his upland neighbors had to fight the high dry prairie for subsistence, and the battle had strengthened them. Beginning with Kaffir corn as his challenge to the thin limestone soil, he had worked out a successful rotation of drought-resisting crops. He had graded up his herd of cattle and developed a profitable connection with the Big Grove creamery. He had picked up additional parcels of land for pasture. He had opened a surface coal mine that yielded a steady small revenue. In time, he had made his home, set amidst his rolling twelve hundred acres, a sort of social center and agricultural experiment station.

PASSING from his beloved upland to the long slope leading to Plum Creek, his car bouncing over sun-baked clods of black mud and shimmying in the grip of iron-hard ruts, Kaff's feeling of depression deepened. At the roadside, strands of barbed wire hung saggingly from rotting posts, whole sections of fence at times being completely hidden by towering weeds. He came to the last turn; a mile and a quarter straight ahead, just across Plum Creek ford, was Ham's house.

"Damn this road!" he cursed irritably, reducing the whoopie's speed and fixing his powerful grip more firmly on the steering wheel. "They call this here neighborhood 'northwest of the law,' but it sure looks to me like it's clean outside of civilization!" he added bitterly. "Gets more so ever' time I see it, too."

He was coasting as he struck the timber's edge; there he plunged boldly at the center of the maze of ruts confronting him and turned the switch to start his engine. As if she had been waiting for the signal of the motor's renewed buzz, a girl on horseback appeared from behind a clump of alder bushes that hid the road at a slight elbow. She pulled up and waited for Kaff to stop alongside.

"Howdy, Uncle Kaff," she greeted noncommittally.

"Oh, hello, Lyddy!" Little's response was hearty. "Your pa at home?"

He put a foot up on the door of the car and leaned back indolently, his glance meeting the girl's uneasy stare with a disarming carelessness. She was thin-lipped, with cleanly cut nose and chin, delicately molded cheek-bones, gray-blue eyes and dead-black hair curling from under the dingy, orange-colored tam she wore. She was meager rather than slender, and, with the intense gaze of her eyes and the com-

posure of her bearing, gave the impression of a forced maturity, of more than her twenty summers.

"Lyddy'd be a durn pretty gal if things was different!" Kaff Little drew a voiceless observation from the accumulated wisdom of his fifty-two checkered years.

"Pa'll be home directly." Lydia Jenkins turned her horse, flinging the reply to Little's question over her shoulder. "Forgot something," she explained as she galloped off in the direction from which she had come.

"Well, all right," Kaff mused, a quizzical grin lifting one corner of his mustache-shaded mouth. He got down very deliberately to crank the car, rolled a cigarette, lighted it, stood abstractedly as if listening to the engine's harsh song, then climbed in. "I expect she's off to tell Ham it's me, an' not Bud Wheeler, a-comin'."

He ambled on, splashed through the shallow water of the ford, clattered up the short slope and shut off the engine in front of a picket gate that was a travesty of its species. Lydia was standing inside with her mother, a thin, nervous caricature of the energetic Violet Cannon who long ago had won the first husband from the ranks of the picturesque Texas cowboys. Mrs. Jenkins met Kaff's "Howdy, Vi'let," with a worried smile.

"Come on in, Kaff," she invited quickly. "Ham'll be back in a minute."

She turned toward the small, tired looking, unpainted frame house as Lydia opened the gate and untied her horse.

"Off again, Lydia?" Kaff's question was followed by a smile suggesting secret knowledge and inviting friendly confidence, and it halted the girl.

She led her horse close to the battered car, put her hand on its flaring mudguard and looked squarely at her old friend.

"Uncle Kaff," she questioned hurriedly, twisting the patched bridle reins about her left hand, "what did you come for?"

The smile disappeared from his face; he leaned forward in an attitude of bodily stiffness.

"I'll answer that if you'll tell me what you think I'm here for," he countered.

"About Bud Wheeler?" Lydia's prompt query drew a curt nod. "Pa and Brig think he's coming out here—maybe tonight—they're uneasy. Do you know if he is?"

"Well—" Kaff hesitated, running a calloused palm about the rim of the steering wheel as he considered his next words—"yes, I think he's comin'." Then, watching her swing lightly to the battered man's saddle she rode, "You goin' to tell Brig now?" She nodded. "All right. Tell him I'm takin' your pa for a ride—want to talk to him. Tell Brig I'll be stayin' for supper, if your ma'll let me."

Nodding again, she turned west to gallop along the road for a hundred yards and disappeared around a corner of the little field where its fence posts were overshadowed by the timber.

"A blind man could find that still!" Kaff reflected pessimistically, tracing in his mind the courses of the three brush-filled ravines that ran down from the western prairie plateau, north of Ham's farm. "It's in that second draw. Now, if Ham——"

However, he feared that his hope was futile. Jenkins had been moonshining so long and bootlegging the stuff so successfully that he had come to believe himself immune from arrest. The law had never yet reached in to halt him, therefore it never would! In his simple reasoning Ham had deliberately blinded himself to the fact that a new régime of law enforcement had come to Big Grove, the county seat. Gone were the old sheriff's deputies—men who had ridden the range with him and Kaff Little, and who had deliberately shut their eyes to his unlawful activity. In their place were newcomers, young men under Bud Wheeler who were ambitious to clean up such "plague spots" as Plum Creek.

"Of course, they're right," Kaff thought, with a breath of regret. "An' yet——"

He climbed down slowly from his seat and lounged to the gate as Ham Jenkins emerged from the woods beside the ford carrying in the crook of his left arm a trim, cared-for rifle.

"Well!" Kaff greeted his old friend's approach with a broad, lazy grin. "You ol' son-of-a-gun, glad to see you."

His hand met the hard sun-and-dirt stained paw that was thrust out and clasped it warmly. Ham's answering grin discovered rows of surprisingly even white teeth under a drooping, iron-gray, sun-bleached mustache. He was thin, with an in-curve where his blue bib-overalls were cinched, below the pockets, by a dirty web army belt; and his ancient shop-made boots, broken and patched, had sloping heels—Ham had never forgotten that he had been a cowboy.

"What you doin' over in this neck o' woods, Kaff?" In the voice was only the faintest hint of apprehension and in his bearing, under the grimy and tattered

clothes he wore, showed an invincible spirit of youth, though he was three years older than Little.

"Hop in here with me, Ham, an' let's take a short ride—what say, you ol' hoss thief?" Kaff's affectionate smile put the proper interpretation on his epithet.

"Sure," Jenkins eased himself to the seat beside Kaff's, bracing his rifle carefully against the door. "Where we goin'?"

"Over to Blue Canyon," Little answered, pressing the clutch and wiggling the steering wheel as the whoopie plunged forward. "I've always wanted to take a look at that robbers' cave."

Ham turned upon his companion a quick sidewise glance, but said nothing until they approached a side road.

"Turn north here," he instructed.

They mounted slowly, over a rocky, rain-gullied road under the splotched and lengthening shadows of scattering scrub oaks. They emerged upon the prairie, where rank dead grass all but concealed the tracks, and stiff weeds and red-topped sumach bushes beat an irregular tattoo against the car's radiator. Ham got down to lay flat a sagging pole-and-wire gate, then stepped back on the running board.

"Straight ahead to them blackjacks," he directed. He steadied the leaning rifle, and watched in silence the faint wheel tracks roll evenly back under the car. Then, "Stop here!"

They got out of the whoopie and walked off to the left over rock-strewn, red-sandy ground. Fifty yards away, unexpectedly, they came to the rim of the narrow gash in the earth that someone in ironic mood had dubbed a canyon.

"It's right in here somewheres—I ain't just sure," Ham spoke, as they followed a dim trail along the rim. "I ain't been here for over a year, not since I come over to help pick up them two deputy sheriffs from Echo." He stopped, oriented himself, moved forward again. "Ought to be right there." He led the way over a boulder heap and down to a narrow shelf under the rim, on which young blackjacks grew. "Yep." He halted and pointed.

IT WAS unmistakable: a great sheet of rock jutting out from the canyon's rim roofed a space as big as a small bedroom. In front, at the edge of the shelf, grew a fringe of buck brush.

"They sure had a hidin' place, didn't they!" Kaff exclaimed.

Ham turned to point back toward the car, and Kaff saw that their heads came just above the rim of the canyon.

"Cal an' Dick Weldon shot them Echo officers from here," Jenkins explained. He indicated the pile of boulders over which they had scrambled.

"Sho!" breathed Kaff, a throaty sound of pity. "They run right into a trap—like shootin' quail settin'."

They squatted at the shelter's entrance and discussed the story of the Weldons and their gang, spoiled fruit of Plum Creek's wild human harvest.

"Dick wasn't really bad," Ham protested. "I knowed him ever since he was a little kid. Only when Cal followed the family in here three years ago from Arkansas an' got tired makin' corn whisky an' took to hijackin' automobiles an' holdin' up country stores an' banks—well, Dick stuck to him, an' they got Whitfield an' the two Rogers boys in with 'em."

Ham began to flick pebbles down the steep slope beyond the buck brush, appearing to bask with keen enjoyment in the mellow sunshine but really waiting for Kaff to reveal the purpose of his call.

"'Big Joe' Harley tipped Cal off that them officers was comin', didn't he?" Kaff asked.

Jenkins flung a suspicious, inquiring look at the other.

"Dunno," he replied. "You hear all kinds of stories."

"They never got any proof?"

"No. Folks said that nigger used to sneak in supplies to the boys here. They said he saw them Echo officers trackin' Cal's car from Delaware an' give the alarm. I dunno."

"They finally got Cal an' the Rogers boys over on Caney, didn't they?" Kaff broke an extended silence to ask, then went on to answer his own question. "Big posse from Vinita an' Muscogee, I remember. Killed all three. Wonder what's become of Dick an' Whitfield?"

"Dunno." Ham eased himself to a comfortable seat against the trunk of a blackjack, reached up idly to pluck at a bit of faded twine hanging from a low limb. "Hello, I bet the boys used this string for a line to hang their dishrags on!"

Another long silence.

"They always get 'em — it don't pay, Ham," at last from Kaff.

"Hijackin'? Bank robbin'? No."

Jenkins met the observation with a prompt acquiescence.

"I mean buckin' the law, Ham."

"Aw, hell!" Jenkins laughed; now Kaff was beginning to unbelt. "Meanin' all laws, Kaff?" He grinned derisively.

"Well," Little affirmed, "you can't pick an' choose. Maybe one law's what you an' me thinks a fool law, but if you break it you lay yourself open to trouble same as if it was important. A sheriff ain't a law-maker, Ham; but he's supposed to carry out the law, and if he wants to pull you for deestillin', why he's got the right to."

"Yeh?" Ham challenged, then entered upon a familiar, dispassionate calculation. "Here's a sum in arithmetic, Kaff. Which is worth more, eight gallons of corn liquor to the acre at twenty dollars a gallon, or twenty-five bushels of nubbins at forty cents a bushel? I'll tell you. Eight times twenty dollars, even countin' out all manufacturin' costs, sugar an' copper kittles an' such, an' countin' out all sellin' costs, is mighty nigh eight times better. One way, your crop pays interest on the mortgage an' somethin' over; the other way, you're foreclosed an' kicked out to root hog or die. The way I figure it, some laws ain't sensible. Yeh?"

"Uh-huh. Still——"

"I know. You're a good farmer an' a modern stockman, Kaff. You ain't mortgaged an' you've got a bank account." He laughed suddenly, cocking a twinkling eye at Little as he added, "Besides, you couldn't make a pint of corn juice fit to drink if you was to work over it a month of Sundays!"

"I'll say this, Ham, if I was a-makin' squirrel whisky an' Bud Wheeler got after me I'd sure hump myself to sink my still into the deepest hole I could find in Plum Creek."

"Yeh?" Jenkins studied the other's intent face for a minute. "I've heard that young hombre's out for b'ar."

"He gets what he goes after, too, Ham; you know it."

"It ain't so easy," Jenkins volunteered after a long silence. "I'd take your advice if I was workin' alone. But nearly everybody around here's mixed up in the business some way—sort of countin' on it. I'm supposed to help 'em, an' now Brig's runnin' it harder than I ever did. Even Vi'let helps; her an' Brig's worse set ag'in this prohibition law than me!"

"Now Brig," Kaff cut in argumentatively, "he'd ought to have more sense; he's smart enough to know deestillin' has got to be stopped. Brig's too smart a boy an' too good a boy to hand over to the devil."

Kaff's mind was running on Ham's twenty-four-year-old son, a blue-eyed, slender youth who had reaped more than his share of glory in the Argonne with the Ninetieth Division, and who seethed with the yeasty upsurge of energy and the joy of adventurous living. For years, Kaff had borne his brevet title of "uncle," bestowed by Brig and Lydia, with satisfaction and secret pride, and his affection for the boy was not lessened by the knowledge that he was in danger.

"The war ruint Brig," Ham commented curtly.

"Ruint? You make me tired, Ham!" Kaff spoke heatedly. "If I could get Brig over to my place, get him to work on a quarter section, with a little bunch of white-faced cattle—they're dirt cheap now—an' half a dozen Holsteins an' a cream separator an' a nice hard-workin' wife, keep him busy an' interested, doggoned if I wouldn't back him ag'in any young fellow I know. In ten years—yes, in five!—I'd have that boy in the legislature."

Kaff's enthusiasm brought a quick flush of gratitude to Jenkins' face.

"I know how you feel," he muttered in obvious embarrassment. "Dern shame you an' Betty ain't got no kids."

The two sat wordless, struggling—one for the soul of a youth, the other against circumstances that seemed to have caught him and the whole Plum Creek neighborhood in an ugly web; and between them unrolled the long years of their staunch companionship and the sympathy born of their own shared wild days. At length Ham rose.

"Time to go to supper," he said evenly, pointing toward the sun that was going down behind the blackjacks.

"You're dead right, Kaff," he admitted as they walked slowly to the car. "If I could——"

"There's time, Ham; maybe if I could talk to Brig— We could smash that still before Bud gets here." Ham shook his head.

"Brig's sore at Bud; he wouldn't listen to you."

"Now, if Bud would only hold off for a while——"

The expression of Kaff's thought died in a breath of regret. Why hadn't he tackled Ham long ago? Why had he dreaded mixing into the Plum Creek mess? Now Wheeler was ready to pounce!

OPPOSITE to Kaff at supper sat Brig Jenkins, a high light of anticipation dancing in his blue eyes, a sort of vibrant energy vitalizing his quick movements as he satisfied his lusty appetite. He, too, had materialized suddenly from the shelter of the woods, a rifle across his arm, while Kaff was washing his face and hands at the well. He had appeared soon after Lydia's return, and his close-up greeting of the visitor had held a bantering, boyish note.

"Hello, Uncle Kaff," he had cried. "I hear you've come to help entertain Bud Wheeler."

Little had made a final scrubbing swipe of wet hands at the back of his neck before looking up.

"Is Bud comin' out this evenin'?" he had asked, and both had laughed.

Now as they ate, with Lydia flitting from table to stove for fresh hot biscuits and flour gravy, Brig indirectly renewed his taunt.

"Ma," he grinned, "I understand we're goin' to have a caller; you'd ought to set another plate. Maybe Bud'll want supper, time he gets out here."

Violet Jenkins looked sharply at Little, then at Ham, and her eyes clouded, like a pool roiled by a heavy foot.

"That young squirt!" Her aggressive gaze turned again to Kaff. "Say, if you got any stand-in with Wheeler you better tell him to stay away from Plum Creek an' all my folks!" she broke out. There was a significant, darting glance of her eyes toward Lydia, and Little reflected in the moment before replying that his wife's talk of a developing friendship between the girl and the young county sheriff, begun when Lydia had stayed in Big Grove for a month with her friend Mary Winger, was something more than baseless gossip.

"All right, Vi'let, I'll sure tell him when I see him."

His loud laughter annoyed the woman.

"Somebody ought to spank him," she flared. "Braggin' about what he's goin' to do to folks that minds their own business."

"Now, Vi'let," Ham interposed, "you ain't fair to Bud. He sure don't brag, an' they ain't anybody I know wants the job of spankin' him either."

"Tin soldier!" exploded Brig, his blue eyes snapping. "Came home with silver service stripes on his blouse."

"Yes, but what of it!" Lydia faced her brother with anger blazing in her white face. "He was guardin' T. N. T., carryin' out orders in New Jersey, same as you was in the Argonne."

She subsided at her mother's fierce, "Stop it!"

"Anyway," Brig spoke to Kaff Little rather than to his sister, "Wheeler'd better keep away from Plum Creek—it's unhealthy."

Pushing back his plate, he rose to fetch his hat, coat and rifle from the front room. "See you later, pa?" he turned to ask, before stepping outside.

"Yeh, I expect to be over later," Ham answered nervously.

Leaving Ham helping his wife clear the table and wash the dishes, Kaff joined Lydia at the barn when she went to feed her horse. At the crib door they stood close together for a time in earnest conference.

"What does pa say?" she asked.

"Didn't say much," Kaff replied, "but I judge he'd go out now an' bust up that still if Brig wasn't so set on keepin' it goin'. He knows Wheeler ain't bluffin'." Little had a momentary feeling of surprise that he could talk frankly and understandingly with Lydia; he had all but forgotten that there is in youth a passionate yearning for truth and justice.

"Oh, Uncle Kaff, I've always loved Brig so—mighty nigh worshipped him since I was a little girl!" the girl burst out in a rush of feeling provoked by Little's complete sympathy. "He's loved me, too; and he's such a boy still—it would nearly kill me to see him go on the way he's started!"

"Tell me this, Lyddy," Kaff ventured, "Is Brig gettin' friendly with Al Spender? I've heard talk."

"Yes," she admitted, a flat note of misery in her voice. She came closer, put a hand on her old friend's arm and continued in a hurried undertone, "I wish I could talk to ma, but she won't listen to a word against Brig, or Al Spender; neither she nor Brig believes the stories you hear about Al. Seems like I must tell you. I've——"

She hesitated.

"Go on, Lyddy," Kaff urged.

"Yes. Well, I've been kind of friendly with Al. He likes me. I've made him talk, led him on when he's been drinking too much—something pa or Brig never has done!" A pathetic boast, her crumb of comfort.

"Al's reckless when he's drunk," she continued. "He talks too much, and

scares me, but I guess it's his recklessness that makes Brig like him; seems like the war changed my brother. He's not bad or——"

"I know that, Lyddy," Kaff assented quietly.

"But he's more restless and wants excitement," she went on. "Then he and some of the boys from around here that went to France together ain't fair to Bud Wheeler; seems as if they're daring him to come out and do his duty. Bud's held off for a long time, because he likes Brig—and me, too, I think, but he can't let things go on forever."

"An' Al Spender?" Kaff prompted as Lydia fell silent. "What do you know about him?" The girl sought to fix Little's eyes with her own troubled ones and spoke in a worried undertone.

"He's told me too much; he thinks I'll marry him!" There was a sobbing catch in her voice, and a shiver of repulsion shook her hand. "His brother came by today and told me that Al's on his way down from Kansas, and he's anxious to see me," she said hurriedly.

"He's been busy up there—banks?" Kaff suggested.

"I don't know." Her white face was near enough for Little to read its reflection of acute misery. "I don't know," she repeated. "More likely, it's a car."

"Hijackin'? He runs 'em down here?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Probably one tonight. Oh, Uncle Kaff, seems like I was in a kind of trap, and I can't see any way out!"

"Well, well, Lyddy," he soothed, "we'll think of somethin'."

They stood without speaking for some minutes, their eyes lifted to the sharp line of cleavage between the surrounding darkness and the starlit sky rising above the outermost fringe of Plum Creek timber. The silence was broken by the sound of a rattling small car in second speed going up the rocky road toward the robbers' cave in Blue Canyon.

"That's Big Joe," Lydia explained.

"He sure makes a noise," Kaff commented with a laugh.

Lydia's grip on his arm tightened.

"Can you see a light up north there?" she asked. Her voice was agitated as she pointed in the direction in which the negro was driving.

Kaff searched the horizon with eyes keen for such signs and nodded.

"Yes. It's faint; looks like a prairie fire startin'."

"Oh, it's Al—he's come!"

"What do you mean?" Little's question was crisp, insistent.

"Al told me once, when he was drinking, about his signal. That's it—his signal to Big Joe. He's waiting up there in a stolen car till Joe comes, and they'll hide it somewhere—I don't know just where. Oh, I'm afraid if Brig sees the light he'll go, and—Uncle Kaff, I don't know what to do! If Bud Wheeler comes—is he sure coming, tonight?"

Little put his hand on Lydia's, pressed it warmly, then stiffened.

"Come, Lyddy," he said sharply, "we've got to get busy. Bud is comin—unless I can head him off. Say, where's the nearest phone?"

"At Wes Madden's, down the creek; you know Wes?"

"Yes." He stood for a minute in deep thought, weighing in his mind the consequences of the action he proposed to take, then, "I'm goin' to drive lickety split to Wes', get Big Grove on the phone an' try to catch Bud Wheeler. Lyddy, I want you to go an' fetch Brig back here to the house, without fail. If I can get Bud after Al Spender—sure you don't care for Al too much, Lyddy?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Kaff; it was for Brig's sake that I—I seemed friendly. I'll go now. Will you be back later?"

"I sure will," Kaff promised.

Following the uncertain, bouncing gleam of his headlights, he drove south at reckless speed over the rutted black-earth road to Madden's.

IS "three longs and three shorts," twice repeated, brought a drawled hel-lo from a house thirty miles away, at the edge of Big Grove.

"That you, Ace?" he demanded. "Little speakin'. I want to speak to that triflin' boy of yours. Yes, the sheriff; tell Bud to hop to the phone pronto. He's out? Be back? Oh, all right. Tell him I'll call him in the mornin'. Well, so long, ol'-timer!"

Kaff turned away from the telephone and to Wes Madden, a tall, dark-skinned quarter-blood of forty.

"Come an' take a little ride, Wes; I'll bring you back pretty soon," he invited. Wes glanced inquiringly at his wife, who sat knitting beside the round table in the center of the small sitting-room. She

read the record of suppressed excitement and impatience in the older man's face and nodded.

"Don't know as you want to get mixed up in this, Wes, but here's the situation," Kaff said, as the two left the room. He sketched rapidly the facts and inferences on which he was acting. "I'm aimin' to head Bud off before he gets to Ham's place." He plumped a final question, "Want to come?"

"Yes; Ham's a good friend of mine," Madden agreed quickly. Then, as they started, "Short cut right up here a piece, if you're figurin' on catchin' him east of the timber—I'll show you where to turn off."

They came into the Big Grove road at the fringe of woods and the whoopie labored sturdily up the long slope to the high prairie. Kaff leaned forward to switch off his lights.

"We'll stop at the top of the hill," he suggested. Presently they ran into a clump of horseweed, where he shut off the engine. Hidden from sight of anyone approaching from Big Grove, they sat quite still, listening, straining to pick up, above the incessant cricket song in the dead grass, the sound of Bud Wheeler's car.

"I expect Bud'll stop his car somewheres around here," Kaff observed, and Wes grunted. Twisting uneasily in the seat, Little complained, "Wish he'd get a move on." He was thinking of the task he had set Lydia, of Ham's intention to join Brig at the still, of Big Joe Harley driving to meet Al Spender. Too much delay could spoil his plan, tentative as it was and the product of a moment's inspiration.

Wheeler's coming was announced by a brief flash of headlights as his car swung west at a section line a mile away. Then its lights went out, and the waiting men heard the hum of the powerful motor. As Little had surmised, the car slowed, crept close to the brow of the rise and stopped. Men got out, and the driver reversed it before shutting off the engine.

"Better let them boys know we're here," said Kaff, leaving his seat and noisily lifting the hood of his car.

"Got some matches, Wes?" he called to his companion. "Looks like I'm disconnected—can't get no contact."

He made his shouted diagnosis good, then spun the starting crank vigorously. In the ensuing silence, they heard Bud Wheeler's voice.

"Come on: it's Kaff Little and Wes Madden," the sheriff said. He and his four companions advanced swiftly on foot. "Stalled, Kaff?" he threw out casually as he came opposite.

"Who's that?" Kaff bluffed. "Oh, it's you, Bud. Say, boy, I got news for you—tried to get you on Wes' phone a few minutes ago."

He left his car, followed by Madden, and fell into step beside the sheriff.

"Don't think I'll need you and Wes." Wheeler hesitated in his stride, and his voice was cold and quiet as he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "You two'd better fix your whoopie and get going."

"So?" Kaff ignored the advice. His next words came with a low, sharp emphasis. "Don't happen to want to catch Al Spender, do you, Bud? 'Cause if you do, you'd better listen to me, an 'listen now."

"Al Spender? What do you know, Kaff?" Wheeler walked close beside the other, increasing in a dozen rapid strides the short distance between himself and his trailing deputies.

"I know you've come out to pull Ham an' Brig Jenkins, an' bust up one little ol' still," Little answered. "Small game!" he gibed. "But now you've got a chance to catch Al Spender—with the goods. Listen." Kaff told him what he had learned from Lydia; told of the prairie fire signal and of Big Joe Harley's response.

"I wish I'd heard sooner that you was after Ham an' his boy," he continued in a tone charged with regret. "I could've helped. Bud, we both want the same thing, only I want to get Ham an' Brig out of this whisky-makin' business without a fuss—an' it looks like you don't." Kaff spoke bitterly, accusingly.

"Now *you* listen, Kaff!" Wheeler interrupted him sharply. There was an urgency in the command, a hint of distress that raised an exultant hope in Kaff's heart. "Don't you think for a minute I'm making this raid for the fun of it. I know Brig and I know his sister—" he hesitated a moment at the mention of Lydia—"but there's a limit to friendship. The Jenkins outfit is the center of a growing circle of disturbance out here; and Brig, the hot-headed young fool, won't take a friendly warning. Well?"

"I know, Bud," Kaff admitted eagerly. "I know how you feel, but all the same—" his words came out with an added hardness, under which ran a suggested vein of sentiment. "I'm an ol'-timer, same as Ham an' some others around here. I

know 'em all, how they live, know their kids; an' I know the newcomers, too. It's a hard neighborhood, you're right about that, an' it's got to be cleaned up—makes a man sick to see the way they farm. Now, Bud, because I got good friends here, I know the facts: the real bad ones on Plum Creek ain't them that's growed up here or the ol'-timers. The bad bunch are newcomers. Take this Al Spender—God knows he's a maverick. It's fellows like them; they're a blight. Boys like Brig admire them for their deviltry an' get to thinkin' law an' order's ol'-fashioned.

"Well, you want to clean up Plum Creek—an' you start out by raidin' Ham's still an' arrestin' him an' Brig. Don't you know that'll set the whole neighborhood ag'in you? Somebody'll crack down on you some day; then your friends'll take up the scrap, an' before it's over there'll be hell to pay an' no pitch hot. Widows an' orphans, an' a hornet's nest that I wouldn't want to touch with a fifty-foot pole.

"Get to the bottom of the trouble; go after Al Spender; root out Big Joe Harley; an' keep your eyes peeled for the foreign trash—then it won't be hard to put down whisky makin'."

UT Wheeler was paying scant attention to Little now; his mind was occupied with a picture of Lydia Jenkins as he had come to know her during the summer month while she was visiting at Big Grove, when he had won her friendship: a straight-thinking, simple-spoken girl, with an unconventional beauty and a warm spirit that had made a swift and lasting impression upon him. With a flash of decision, he turned to Kaff Little.

"How did Lydia know that fire was Al's signal?" he asked.

"Sorry, but I can't tell you that, Bud," Little answered. "If I was you, I'd find out—later."

"Is Brig apt to be with Al Spender now?" Wheeler asked.

"Not now; Lydia's bringin' him back from the brush to the house. He might be tomorrow, if we don't——"

"Then Al counts on roping Brig in," Wheeler interrupted. "All right, let's figure." The sheriff's thought ran evenly with his swift footsteps down the slope to Plum Creek woods. "Al's got a stolen car; he's signalled to Harley; they'll hide the car, and Al will stop overnight somewhere around here—maybe in Jenkins' barn. He don't know we're coming, but you're sure Ham and Brig do.

"All right, we'll make a bluff play for Ham and see if we can toll Al into a trap. Here, let's make our arrangements." They halted, and when Wes Madden and Wheeler's four men came up there was a conference of the closely gathered group.

"Take Hardin, Fred and Pate and surround Jenkins' house," the sheriff presently instructed one of his men whom he called Sanders. "Get protection for yourselves, then make a noise, call out to one another; and if Ham and Brig don't shoot, you boys start firing—over the roof. See? Start what sounds like a battle, but be sure to keep under cover; I don't want anybody hit.

"I'll take Skip Thomas and go with Kaff Little and Wes Madden and try to locate Al Spender and Harley; they've got a stolen car up there north of Ham's place.

"Remember, you boys have got to hold the two Jenkinses in the house till I come. Watch out back of you. Got it straight?"

"Yep!" Sanders answered for the detachment.

"All right, move along; we'll swing around to the north soon as we cross the creek."

Sanders led off. Beyond the ford, Kaff showed the way to Wheeler, Madden and Thomas through the timber, across a corner of the Jenkins cornfield, then quarteringly toward the faint glow of a fire that was making slow progress in the short grass under the upland blackjacks.

YDIA JENKINS made her way lightfootedly up a twisting, dim and leaf-strewn trail leading out from the timber, some six hundred yards north of the house, through a narrow ravine choked with young elm trees, haw bushes, buck brush, greenbriars and rank dead weeds. Not until she was near enough to make her low call heard could she see the glow from the dry stick fires which Brig had started under the three copper boilers of the wildcat still. Then she caught their dim reflection from the wet sides of the barrels in which the fermenting "mash" was stored, and the sour smell of the barreled stuff smote her nostrils.

"What's the idea, Lyddy?" Brig de-

manded, stepping out from the shadow of the trees as his sister came up.

"You're wanted at the house," she said shortly, rather breathlessly. "We got word about Wheeler. Come on!"

Without further words, she turned and hurried back. After dashing water on the low fires, Brig took up his rifle and followed. He found Lydia standing in the outer kitchen doorway; she hurriedly thrust a heavy box of cartridges into his hand.

"Pa says you're to stay here in the kitchen," she instructed. "Ma and I'll be in the cellar." She indicated a mounded dugout in the yard. "Keep still."

Hastening home from the still, before Brig's reappearance at the house, Lydia had run to her father and cried, "Brig has just got word about Wheeler—he's on the way! Brig's gone down to the ford to listen for his car, and said for us to put out the light and for ma and me to get into the cellar." To Ham this had seemed to be good counsel; and he had then instructed her about placing her brother when he should return.

Now Brig tiptoed to the doorway connecting the front room and kitchen.

"Got plenty cartridges, pa?" he asked in a loud whisper. There was a tingle of excitement in the youngster's veins—he'd had nothing like this since November 11, 1918!

"Yes," Ham replied. Then half to himself he sighed, "Hope I won't have to use 'em."

"If I was you, pa, I'd shove the bed up ag'in the door an' drag the mattress off onto the floor back here by the kitchen door, where you can watch the front door an' the windows, too," Brig suggested practically. "Lay down flat behind the mattress an' sort of wad it up; it'll turn rifle bullets if you do."

"Yeh," Ham assented. "You all right, Brig?"

"Will be in a minute, 'twixt the wood box an' flour barrel."

Sounds of their preparations reached the ears of Lydia and her mother, sitting in the chill blackness of the outdoor cellar with shawls drawn close about their shoulders. They waited in a silence that was emphasized rather than broken by the faint overhead insect sounds and the restless pawing of a horse at its manger in the log stable.

"Lyddy," her mother asked unexpectedly, "what kind of a man is Bud Wheeler, anyway?"

Surprised, Lydia hesitated before replying.

"Why, ma, he's sort of quiet—about the build of Brig; brown eyes; around thirty years old, I guess. Takes his job serious; he's a new kind of sheriff—thinks everybody ought to obey the law."

The girl's tone held no irony, but Violet Jenkins laughed derisively.

"He ain't a plumb fool, is he?"

"No," Lydia denied curtly.

"Well, then, maybe he won't start a battle with Ham an' Brig. Did you see him right often down at Big Grove?"

"Yes; he got to coming around nearly every evening with Henry Wells—Henry was going with Mary."

"Did you like him?" The question was plumped sharply.

"Yes," the girl admitted.

"Well—I'm sorry, Lyddy." A suggestion of sternly concealed love and sympathetic understanding was in her last words.

The minutes dragged on, seeming to prolong themselves to maddeningly slow, throbbing measures of time; after a protracted, unstirring wait, Mrs. Jenkins sighed.

"Reckon he ain't comin'," she muttered.

"Oh, he'll come," Lydia asserted in a flat voice.

They relapsed into a trying, straining silence.

At last they heard, faintly, like a clear-cut echo, the voice of Sanders as he placed his first man east of and in front of the house.

"You'll be O. K. here, Fred; watch the front door an' windows," he directed.

"Was that Bud talkin'?" her mother leaned to ask Lydia.

"No," whispered the girl.

"Wonder if he'll come an' knock at the door!" The older woman's sarcastic whisper was followed by a nervous laugh.

"Cover the kitchen door, Hardin; keep 'em inside," came the voice again, from the log stable north of the house.

Another interval of waiting was punctuated by Sanders' instructions to the man he had placed behind the woodpile west of the house.

"Keep your eyes on that kitchen window; see, Pate, right over that washtub ag'in the wall?"

"That's that no-'count Pate Hicks, I bet," Mrs. Jenkins breathed angrily.

The two settled to an apparently interminable period of waiting, which was ended by an oath and an urgent warning

from Sanders, lying in a ditch beside the road.

"Watch out in front there, Fred," he warned. "Ain't that door openin'? Drive 'em back."

Fred's rifle cracked; its report was echoed from the stable; Sanders fired, then Pate Hicks.

"Did you make a move, pa?" Brig called softly to his father in the dead silence that followed.

"No," Ham replied in a loud, excited whisper.

"They're shootin' wild," Brig observed. "Wonder where Bud Wheeler's hidin'?" He lifted his head to peer through the little uncurtained square of the south kitchen window; Sanders heard the slight movement he made, rested his rifle on the edge of the ditch and sent a bullet zinging over the roof. In reply, Brig jammed the end of his own weapon through the glass and fired at the flash; the bullet threw dirt on Sanders, prone in the ditch. Fred and Hardin started a fusillade.

In the cellar, Mrs. Jenkins pressed closer to Lydia, found and gripped the girl's hand in a fierce pressure.

THREE-QUARTERS of a mile away, where Blue Canyon emerged from the limestone formation and broke through the softer sandstone of the plateau's crest, the negro, Harley, was leaning against the side of a big car whose new varnish reflected the starlight. Al Spender, a straight-brimmed white cowboy hat tilted over his sidewise glancing gray eyes, neat in belted overcoat and yellow gloves, sat at ease behind the steering wheel. Ten yards back, drawn up beside the negro's whoopie, was a third car, battered and weather worn, the one Spender meant to use when he and his three men drove back across the Kansas line for their next "job."

Now the three were waiting with accustomed patience for the return of the two who had been sent out to scout the surrounding neighborhood; by no avoidable chance must their next move be spied upon.

At the sound of the first rifle shot, Al sat up and the big negro whirled around.

"What's up, Joe?" Al demanded when the third shot echoed.

"That shootin's over at Jenkinses," Harley declared. "I reckon Bud Wheeler's arriv'l"

"Get in, Joe," Spender commanded. "I'm goin' to take a look around. Reckon it's a battle?"

"You don't reckon Ham an' Brig'd go along without no scrap, do you?" the negro answered with a laugh. The heavier fusillade began, and Big Joe exulted, "Hot dog, boy, they's a-shootin'!" And to Al Spender, "If I was you, Al, I wouldn't go near. That shootin'll drive ever' man on Plum Creek to his hole. I'd wait here for Webb an' Billy an' put away this car an' beat it."

Spender shook his head, pressed the self-starter.

"Stay here, Gray; I won't be gone more'n a few minutes," he called back to the man in the battered car.

He sent the big car purring down the dim, familiar track through the woods toward the Jenkins place. As he ran at a foot pace, one of his scouts whistled softly, stepped out from the shadows and hopped on the running board.

"Webb's headin' back to the quarry; where you goin'?" he asked, leaning over Al's shoulder.

"Up here a little ways," Spender answered.

A quarter of a mile from the house he stopped, turned the car around and backed into the dense shadow of a clump of walnut trees.

"We'll investigate," he said, getting out. Then, in a tone that betrayed anxiety in spite of his effort to make it casual, "I wonder if the old woman an' Lyddy're helpin' hold the fort?"

They walked unsuspectingly past the clump of paw-paw trees under which crouched Wheeler, Kaff Little, Madden and Skip Thomas.

"Was that Al?" Wheeler leaned to whisper the query to Little.

"Yes, he was walkin' in front; you aimin' to follow him?"

For answer, the sheriff rose and touched Thomas and Madden and led the way. Three hundred yards from the house, they halted at the sound of Al Spender's low command.

"Stop here an' hunt you a tree," he directed. A bullet from Sander's rifle had buzzed overhead, signaling a renewed burst of firing.

"Hold 'em inside, boys—till daylight if you have to!" came Sander's call to his posse.

"Can't help 'em; come on, let's get back," commented Spender dejectedly.

At Wheeler's touch, Little, Madden and

Thomas withdrew silently into the shadow until Spender and his two companions had regained the car and started its engine.

"Now what?" Wheeler whispered to Kaff.

"They're goin' to hide that car," Little answered. "I've got a hunch we'll see somethin' interestin' if we move up yonder half a mile or so. Let's get goin'."

"Move ahead, then," Wheeler agreed, and Little led the way at a swinging walk, crossed the road leading up the timbered slope, along which Spender was driving the throttled car, turned west to push up the ravine in which was hidden the Jenkins still. Passing the copper kettles and barrels, Kaff chuckled.

"Here's Ham's little ol' outfit, Bud. Want to capture it?"

The sheriff grunted and fell in beside Kaff as he climbed the bank, turned north and entered upon a stretch of open prairie. At a scattering grove of blackjacks they paused; Little gathered the others close about him.

"Straight ahead's Blue Canyon, about a hundred yards," he whispered. "If I'm not mistaken, Al Spender'll drive over to the edge from the west an' stop. Then him an' his gang'll get busy."

"Here," Wheeler ordered, "you take my pistol, Skip, you lend yours to Wes; our rifles'll do us."

They squatted where they were.

Spender brought the car up under the trees very gently, the engine sighing, a stiff branch of a blackjack slowly raking its folded top.

"Come on, Gray," he called to the man in the other car. "Bring them ropes, slickers an' tarp; we're all here."

"What the devil!" Wheeler whispered.

"Wait till they get busy," Kaff cautioned. "Then we'll sneak close, an' you'll see somethin'!"

A burst of firing at the Jenkins house advertised the continuance of Sanders' siege. It seemed to stir Spender and his men to action.

"Here, Joe, pass that rope under the axle—all right," his sharp, commanding voice called. Then, "Webb, fasten them slickers around them two trees. Now the other rope, Joe. Gray, you an' Billy roll that tarp over the edge where she's goin' over, an' fasten her tight. All set? Joe, you get down below. Webb, you an' Gray take this rope. Give her two wraps around that tree over the slicker, see? Billy, you an' me'll work this one. Tie both ropes till I release the brakes. Ready?"

Wondering, Wheeler heard the sound of an emergency brake lever being shifted. Rising to his feet at Kaff's nudge, he, Madden and Thomas followed Little, with infinite caution, to a point fifty feet from the stirring men.

"Let her down, one hand at a time, as I count," Spender's voice came again. "Ready! One—two—three—four! A little-hard—she's goin' over the edge! A little at a time now; one—two—three—four—five—six. Hold!" His voice was pitched higher in inquiry, "Is she comin' down all right, Joe?"

"Easy on that right hand rope, Al," came the answer.

"They're lettin' that car down into the ol' K. & G. quarry," Little whispered in Wheeler's ear. "Better send Wes to cover the nigger."

There was a whispered conference; then Wes Madden slipped away to circle out and drop into Blue Canyon above the quarry. The others waited while Spender continued to superintend the slow inching down of the heavy car suspended against the high sheer wall of the old cutting out of which a railway had blasted and hauled thousands of tons of ballast rock.

"Down below," Kaff explained, "it's all overgrown with bushes, briars an' weeds. You could hide a dozen cars there."

"Come on," whispered Wheeler, "we'll help finish the job!"

The three moved forward again, stepping with the utmost deliberation, making no sound, and came in sight of the four men at the ropes, two at each rope. The ropes were warped about the sturdy trunks of blackjacks that had been bound round with yellow slickers for them to pass over with an even friction. Al was counting slowly, and there was a staccato squeaking of the taut ropes against the slickers and the tarpaulin draped over the rock rim of the quarry. The three waited.

"She's landed, Al," the negro's low, relieved cry came up.

Wheeler touched Kaff Little and Skip Thomas, pointing to the men Al had called Gray and Webb. He stepped forward himself to stand behind Spender and Billy. The four hard-breathing men released their hold on the ropes, stood upright to flex the muscles of their arms.

"Keep your hands up!" Wheeler's rifle prodded Al Spender's spine as he uttered the curt command.

At the same instant Kaff Little and Skip Thomas closed in on Gray and Webb.

"Fo' God's sake, Mr. Madden, don' shoot!" came a warning, frightened howl from below.

"Hold that nigger down there," Wheeler called out to Wes. And to Thomas, "Skip, take these fellows' guns away from 'em."

UD WHEELER piloted the little procession, packed into Big Joe's rattletrap car and Al Spender's relic, to Ham Jenkins' stable. His whistle brought Harden, who collected Sanders, Fred and Pate Hicks. The hijackers were properly handcuffed; then Wheeler drew Kaff Little aside for an earnest conference.

"I'll take these birds back now to Big Grove," he proposed, "and forget Ham and Brig. You can tell them, in your own way, what all the shootin' was about."

The sheriff's hand pressed Kaff's arm in grateful acknowledgment of the part he had played, and the ranchman stood close enough to see the pleased grin that broke the firm lines of Bud's face.

"No; wait a minute," Little requested. "I'd like to have Brig see his friend Al before he leaves us."

"All right," Wheeler agreed. "Go and fetch him, but don't get shot. I expect he and Ham are still excited."

Waiting for fifteen minutes, in low talk with the sheriff—a period that seemed to stretch out interminably for Brig and Ham Jenkins—Little walked boldly toward the kitchen door.

"Hello there, Ham!" he called. "Are you asleep?"

"Don't come any closer!" Brig's high-pitched voice warned. "What's the game, old-timer?"

"Got a friend of yours out here, Brig; I want you to see him."

Kaff ignored the young man's warning; and, as he advanced, Lydia ran to him from the cellar.

"Uncle Kaff's with me, Brig—don't shoot!" she cried to her brother. They hurried on. The girl pushed open the door. "Light a lantern, Brig," she urged, "and go with Uncle Kaff." She went to speak to her father.

Suspicious, shaken by the ordeal of the strange siege that had ended with bewildering suddenness, puzzled by the ranchman's reappearance, Brig had difficulty in lighting the lantern. He followed to the stable.

"Throw your light on this here collection!" Little advised, as they rounded its corner. Brig raised the lantern, its gleam illuminating the sullen face of Al Spender, standing handcuffed to Big Joe Harley; whose rolling eyes betrayed his terror.

"Wh—wha-t——?"

Young Brig Jenkins' world of romantic, adventurous outlawry abruptly fell apart at sight of his drooping and dejected hero. His voice shook, the hand that held the lantern trembled. Spender's shamed gaze dropped before Brig's agonized, pleading eyes; he had not preserved even the courage of defiance. He was like a punctured balloon, an exploded firecracker. Silently Kaff watched the boy move along the manacled row.

"Gray—an' Webb, too!" Then, "Who's this?" The one called Billy he didn't know." Turning to Little, he cried "Whats it all about, Uncle Kaff?" His accent of anxious fear stabbed the other.

"Come here, boy," Kaff commanded huskily, putting an arm about his quivering shoulders. He led him to the house as Wheeler and the deputies started the procession of hijackers to Big Grove jail.

"It was this way, Brig—" The ranchman's tone was gentle as he made his explanations.

AFF was back in the Jenkins kitchen after driving Wes Madden home and calling Ma Little on the phone to say, "I'm stayin' all night at Ham's, Ma. Can't tell you over the phone. Now you go to bed, ol' lady!" He was telling of Spender's capture and the discovery in the overgrown quarry of three stolen cars, completely hidden and protected by tarpaulin coverings. Ham listened without interrupting until his friend sat back to laugh at the memory of Al Spender's consternation when he faced round to confront Wheeler.

"How was it, Kaff," he demanded then, "you knowed Al was goin' to hide that car in the quarry?"

"Oh, I had a hunch." Little assumed an air of mystery, directing a fleeting glance at Lydia who sat close beside him. Presently he elaborated. "As they say down at the court house when they indict you for horse stealin', my hunch was based on info'mation an' belief, backed by previous knowledge. You ain't forgot that I had four teams haulin' rock out of that pit for six months, have you, Ham? Or don't

your recollection reach back as fur as sixteen years?"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Now, Ham," his wife reproved, "don't you swear in front of me an' Lyddy!" She dabbed at her eyes with the hem of her apron, sign of relief from sustained tension.

"Where's Brig?" Kaff looked around as though he had just noticed his absence, his question apparently casual.

"He's gone out to sleep in the stable loft," Lydia answered. "You'll have his bed, Uncle Kaff."

"Brig ain't feelin' right well," his mother said, avoiding Little's inquiring eyes: and he knew that the boy was fighting, alone, the decisive battle with his soul.

BEFORE cranking his Ford to rattle back across the blue-misted, softly golden prairie to the eager questioning of Ma, Kaff had a talk with Brig.

"Boy, you come out on the upland an' throw in with me, an' I'll back you four ways from the ace!" he pleaded earnestly. "All this—" he swept a hand toward the ravine in which the still was hidden—"was monkey business, dime-novel nonsense. You're through with it. Your pa's mortgage—we'll fix that, too. What do you say, Brig?"

"You've already said it, Uncle Kaff; I'm through with all this—I'll sure come." Brig looked at the ranchman with the confident gaze of one who has gained a victory.

Lydia ran out, bareheaded, and got into the whoopie.

"I'm going to ride a piece with you, Uncle Kaff," she announced.

Little waited until Ham threw down the axe he had been sharpening at a grindstone near the well and came through the gate.

"Well, ol'-timer," he sympathized, "you'll sure have a time explainin' what all the excitement was about last night."

Ham wiped his wet right hand on his trousers and gripped Little's hand.

"You said it, Kaff," he declared wryly. "But they'll sure find out the truth." Then, jumping ahead in thought, "I'm goin' to cut me some new fence posts today."

Kaff stopped at the crest of the prairie rise beyond the creek to let Lydia out. Their talk finished, her fingers lingered in his grasp and her eyes expressed a gratitude she would never find words to frame. He nodded comprehendingly.

"I'll bet Bud Wheeler won't be huntin' no still if he comes out this way next Sunday," he prophesied above the clatter and throb of the whoopie.

"Uncle Kaff! What——?"

"An' I understand he's sure comin'," he concluded, stepping on the gas.

THE BAYOU SALADE

THE Bayou Salade, later known as South Park, was the southernmost of a group of three vast mountain valleys lying in the north-central part of Colorado, and running up to the Wyoming line. South Park, almost in the center of the state, is between fifty and sixty miles long and from twenty to thirty miles wide, and is the source of the South Platte. It lies on the east side of the Continental Divide, which forms its western boundary. The name Bayou Salade was given to it by French trappers because of numerous salt springs, two salt lakes and a salt creek amidst the green of the rich and plentiful buffalo grass which carpeted it. This combination, together with the shelter provided, made it a great wintering ground for buffalo innumerable and for other animals.

Here was a hunting ground bound to attract the Indians, who fought many bloody battles to settle the question of its ownership; here was a trapping ground par excellence for the mountain-men, especially those from the Arkansas River posts. The Arapahoe trail to this park lay through the canyon of the Boiling Spring River; the Utes, Sioux and Cheyennes came in from other directions. The bitter warfare waged for the possession of this park seemed to have favored the Utes, who made it their principal wintering ground year after year, and enjoyed it in peace except for sporadic raids by the Arapahoes. While the latter raided the park they did not dare remain in it, and thus tacitly admitted the sovereignty of their mortal enemies.

Its park-like bottom covered an area of nearly nineteen hundred square miles, was about nine thousand feet above the sea, and was walled in by high mountain ranges. Pike crossed it in 1806-1807, and in 1844 Fremont returned through it and told the world about it.—C. E. M.

WHITE MAGIC

By CHARLES BEADLE

When Zuloki passed from insolence to open defiance the British African Police knew that the young chief had a coup ready to spring—but little did they suspect the fatal potency of the scheme that was emboldening the natives to revolt

IN A square grass-thatched hut, the mud walls of which were decorated with photographs and pages from illustrated journals, four troopers of the British South African Police sat at a deal table playing cards. Large tin mugs of tepid tea stood at each man's left hand beside the small heap of kaffir beans used as chips.

"Call," droned a fat-faced fellow with drooping, fair mustache. "Too mooch!" he grunted, as his opponent spread out tens over sixes.

"Vy you call?" whined the winner, grabbing the pot with swarthy, hairy hands as the Dutchman carelessly showed a pair of aces. *Nom de Dieu*, ven I haf some-t'ing nobody vant to bet!"

"Aw, quit it!" admonished Tug Wilson, stretching muscular, naked arms over his head. "Neither of you two stiffs could bluff a flea into an extra hop. Oh, darn these flies!" He slapped an ear close set above a straight jaw.

"The only thing the matter with this country," he orated, lifting the tip of each card as he dealt, "is that since Munojumbo quit business it's duller than a Bible class. Police!" he scoffed. "I've been in the darned outfit two years and the only thing I've arrested is a glandered mule. Sure, I'll raise you, Pete. Rest cure for neurasthenics and highbrows, I'll tell the world!"

"Awa' ma laddies!" said a voice behind him. A tall, dour sergeant stood blocking the glare of the hot sun without.

"Patrol. You're on the roster for duty. Saddle up!"

"Why, whatever would be the matter, Sergeant?" demanded Tug, mimicking the Scotch accent. "Is it a dog gone mad and bitten himself? It's the ambulance you'll be wanting, Ah'm thinkin'."

"It is not," retorted Sergeant Crawford solemnly. "Matanga's dead and they'd be burning alive the auld wife for witchcraft. Shake a leg noo. It's an express call from the Native Commissioner and we'll ha' to ride for it. For the de'ils will be burning the lass this nicht wi' the moon."

In ten minutes the men had on their boots and khaki tunics, rolled blankets and patrol cans, slipped on bandoliers; and, taking their saddles from the trees by each cot, were trooping to the stables.

"Give us the details, Jock," said Pete Titton, a long narrow slab of John Bull, as the party rode out of camp with a section of the Black Watch, native police, in the rear.

"No details," said Sergeant Crawford. "We've just got to stop the show, and if

they try to blather arrest the son, Zuloki. There's a lad I've no liking for. He's a long time been hankering after daddy's breeks, I'm thinking, and ower young to remember the last basting they got."

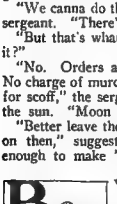
"And I guess the old woman's his mother," put in Tug. "She'll be jealous of the younger wives and ambitious for her son. Mother love stuff. We'll just arrest 'em both for murder in the first degree."

"We canna do that, laddie," retorted the sergeant. "There's no proof."

"But that's what we've got to find, isn't it?"

"No. Orders are to stop the burning. No charge of murder. There'll be no time for scoff," the sergeant added, glancing at the sun. "Moon rises at eight."

"Better leave the Black Watch to follow on then," suggested Tug. "I can spiel enough to make 'em understand."



BY SUNDOWN the police could hear the throb of drums, and it was obvious that they could not reach the chief's kraal at a walking pace before moonrise, so leaving orders with the sergeant of the Black Watch, they cantered on.

The native path wound along valleys between boulder jumbled kopjes now coming upon an open *vlei*, and then leading through open bush and parklike clumps of trees. Tug Wilson, by general consent the best tracker in the troop, led the way. Occasionally came the swishing of a startled herd of buck racing off, the call of a night bird, and ever the throbbing of the drums. Presently to these sounds was added a faint chanting.

"Quite on the cards we may have a scrap after all," said Pete to the sergeant as they slowed up to make the passage of a swamp.

"Maybe," assented Crawford. "Anyhow we'll pull up at da Gomez's winkel and see if he can put us up to anything. He's a canny lad, and should know the latest."

The milk of the rising moon was already swamping the stars before they came in sight of the kraal, a large one of over a thousand huts straddling as usual on the slopes of a boulder-strewn kopje.

Da Gomez was a Portuguese, a reputed former army doctor, a seemingly inoffensive little person usually as mum as a clam about his own affairs. He had evidently heard the patrol, or had been expecting them, for the door of his store opened and against the light of the paraffin swing lamp stood the dwarf-like figure of the owner.

"Goot evening, shentlemen!" said he as the five reined up before the low corrugated iron veranda roof. "Gom and haf a drink, Sergeant."

"No, no. In a hurry," said Crawford. "We're over here to stop yon witch burning. Know anything aboot it?"

"I haf heard," said da Gomez. "Eet ees tomorrow night, yes?"

"Tomorrow night nothing," put in Tug. "Can't you hear the yowling now?"

"Dey make der—vot you gall—beggining, yes? Dey tell me dat, yes?"

"The Commissioner says it's tonight," returned Crawford slowly, "and I'm not taking any chances, man."

"But yes, gom and haf a drink. All—yes?"

"Good night! Come on, laddies!"

"If that bird don't watch his step," said Tug as they cantered away, "he'll sure ruin himself with those drinks."

In the center of the village, where, as customarily, was a large open space and the men's club house, fires glowed. About them the forms of half nude natives swayed from shadow to glow like tiny gnomes, and the high treble of the tribal singer and the hungry bass grunt of the mob in response floated on the night air with sinister clarity. The moon was already silhouetting odd trees and humped rocks upon the summit as the patrol scrambled up to the outskirts of the village unnoticed.

If the natives had any thoughts of interference from the whites, they had forgotten them in the excitement, for not a soul was on guard; everybody, even babes apparently, being massed in the village square working themselves into a proper state of hysteria to enjoy the sacrificial rites.

In the center a huge fire of dry saplings and logs was burning fiercely. Around it danced the warriors, led by Zuloki, the new chief, who was capering higher and screaming louder than any other man. Behind, forming an outer ring, the women swayed and shuffled, moaning to the throb of the drums and kaffir pianos.

As Tug and the sergeant charged knee to knee through the irregular lanes formed by huts and boulders the former spotted a commotion to the right, near the club house.

"There she goes!" he yelled, and swerved Crawford's mount toward a pack of screeching women who were struggling

through the ranks of the howling warriors, bearing a figure in their midst.

"Quick, mon!" shouted Crawford, perceiving Tug's object was to separate the hideous gang from the main body of the warriors.

But Tug was too late, for as his horse bowled over the first two of the warriors, the shrieking hags cast their burden into the flames.

Tug rammed home the spurs, scattering warriors and women, and put the horse at the fire. In the third bound the beast felt the heat of the flames, swerved and leaped sideways.

With a smothered curse Tug slid out of the saddle almost into the fire, and, revolver in left hand, grabbed the feet of the screeching victim and dragged her out.

"Quick," yelled Crawford, grasping the situation. "To him, lads!"

Spurring his animal through the excited mob Crawford reached Tug, whose horse had plunged away riderless.

"Up, man, up!" he shouted.

But Tug thrust the quivering body onto Crawford's saddle bow.

"Git; I'll follow!" he cried, and sprang to the next man, Pete; swung up behind him, and together they charged back through the milling mob into the darkness of the veld.

All this had happened in a few seconds before the startled natives, doped with hysteria, could grasp its meaning. For several moments only a few realized that whites were among them; the others, uninterrupted by the horses, kept up their frantic howling and capering; even the drums were still throbbing.

"HERE to, Sergeant?" shouted Tug as the double-burdened horse pounded alongside.

"Da Gomez. He's a bit o' a doc, they say, and by the way she's squealing, maybe this puir body will need a bit o' tending."

Behind them the drums had ceased. A pandemonium of screams, yells, and howls devoid of any rhythm was in full blast; and against the glow of the fire demoniac gnomes rushed hither and thither, like a disturbed ant's nest.

Da Gomez rushed excitedly onto the veranda as the cavalcade drew up.

"Vot der matter? Vot der matter?" he demanded. "You no stop dem, yes?"

"We stopped 'em all right," responded Tug, "and got the old lady. She's a handmade job for you, I guess!"

"Here she is, Gomez," said Crawford from the saddle. "Help me down with her. I'll get you to doctor her a wee. She needs it, the puir body."

But instead of taking the quivering and now whimpering bundle of skinny limbs, da Gomez stared gaping.

"Here, get out of the daylight!" snapped Pete, and brushing the little man aside he dumped the old negress on the counter of the store beneath the lamp.

She proved to be burned slightly here and there and her hair was singed off; but examination showed no serious injury. Da Gomez seemed too bewildered, or reluctant, to approach until Crawford shoved him forward.

"Do yer job, man, and lively!" the sergeant said sharply. "What's the matter with ye, any hoo?" Then as da Gomez seemed to recover his wits the sergeant turned round and sent Huykers on the back trail to bring up the Black Watch to the store. "Yon black de'il's'll make no fuss the nicht, I'm thinking," he remarked. "Its dark and they'll ha' to have a grand *indaba* first to find out what did happen. So we'll camp here."

"Vot you do in morning, Senhor Sergeant?" da Gomez inquired.

"Arrest Zuloki," retorted Jock curtly.

"'Rest Zuloki!" Da Gomez's pop eyes goggled. He seemed scared.

"Sure thing," said Tug, eyeing him. "He's the chief, ain't he?"

"Ye needn't have any fear your trade'll be ruined, da Gomez," soothed Crawford, thinking the man was frightened about the attitude of the natives to whites after the arrest. "Noo, how aboot the whuskey ye're so free with?"

The Black Watch, twenty in number, arrived and camped in front of the store. The pandemonium in the village died down about midnight, but the fire glowed all night; and in the glow sat the elders holding the indaba prophesied by the sergeant.

II

AT THE meeting of dawn and moonlight the five whites mounted and with the Black Watch in the rear rode across to the village. Their coming was signalled as soon as they started and immediately the great kraal

began to hum like a beehive in swarm.

To the east of the dancing square, amid the rocks and boulders, was the cattle kraal —and the old chief Matanga had been comparatively wealthy in cattle—but there was no sign of small boys dragging away the thorn bushes which blocked the entrance; an ominous symptom signifying usually that the people were in a warlike mood.

"It's that loon, Zuloki," grumbled Crawford. "He's of a mind to be cheeky."

However, as they neared the kraal no active hostile demonstration was made. The sergeant of the Black Watch, Takaki, was ordered ahead to demand that Zuloki come forth to make an *indaba*. The giant Angoni, of Zulu origin, strode blithely forward, grinning in hopeful anticipation of a refusal.

"Ho! Zuloki, son of the Black Elephant!" bawled Takaki in the customary formula, "advance and make *indaba* with thy masters the white men. Ho! Come!"

From the mass of warriors armed with spears—although the Police knew that many muskets were hidden in the crowd also—Zuloki, a slender young buck as black as a stove, clad in a store shirt with many copper and brass bangles, stepped out as haughtily as the Angoni. Advancing within twenty yards of the sergeant he saluted and squatted, gravely followed by a group of elders who formed a half circle about him.

"Ask him," instructed the sergeant, who had no working knowledge of the dialect, "why he permitted the burning of the old woman, which he knows is forbidden?"

"It is the custom of my fathers and the ancient law of my people," retorted Zuloki, insolently, yet with utterly expressionless eyes.

"It is forbidden by the whites, your masters," translated Takaki freely. "Hath the wine of the palm entered thy head that thou hast become mad?"

"Tell the *umlungu*," retorted Zuloki, knowing this use of the word meaning "white man" instead of "chief" was an insult, "that a tree that hath grown for a thousand moons may not be pulled down even by an elephant."

"Eh!" grunted the elders in approval.

"Darned nerve," commented Tug, who could follow the words. "But he's nobody's fool, that kid."

"The white man is stronger than elephants, fiercer than lions, swifter than leopards!" responded the giant Angoni.

"These are his words: that thou, Zuloki, come with them to render count of thy deeds to the master."

"Nay," Zuloki refused, "that may not be. This woman made magic against my father. Was it not so, my brethren?"

"Eh! Eh!"

"Therefore, as the law says, must she die lest his ghost be angry and destroy us."

"Then tell him," ordered Crawford, "that I shall arrest him now."

"Nay," responded Zuloki confidently. "That may not be, for I am the chief in my father's place."

"He who touches the body of the Black Elephant dies," spoke up a wizened old man clad in masses of beads, shells, and amulets, and wearing the rim of a cast off helmet, who sat next to Zuloki.

"Arrest him, Takaki," commanded the sergeant.

"He dies who touches him!" warned the old man again.

"Who is the old man?" inquired Crawford as Takaki hesitated.

"The witch doctor, master." The giant Angoni's spine seemed suddenly to have melted. "They say he is very powerful, master. He knows."

"Nonsense," snapped the sergeant. "Arrest them both."

Still Takaki, born of the greatest fighting race in Africa, he who would have charged a whole regiment single handed and died laughing, hesitated; his eyes even began to roll.

"Damnation, man," exploded Crawford. "D'you hear what I said?"

"Yes, Inkoos."

Takaki's right hand shot up in the ancient royal salute of the Zulus.

"Bayete!" he exclaimed; then advanced slowly— they could not see his eyes.

Zuloki remained as still as one of the boulders about him.

"Rise, O Zuloki!" the big Angoni commanded sternly, standing above him.

Zuloki did not bat an eyelid.

Slowly the big black sergeant reached down.

"I arrest you!" he said.

Simultaneously as the hand touched the arm of Zuloki the witch doctor pointed his finger in the black's face.

"Tabu," he cried clearly.

Zuloki remained immobile, seeming scarcely to breathe. The Angoni was seen to start upward, to gasp. His whole body writhed in an intense, violent convulsion,

sagged at the knees and pitched forward on its face.

"*Ough,*" rose a murmur of admiration from the massed ranks of the warriors behind.

For a few moments none of the whites could realize what had happened. Zuloki still sat motionless, not even condescending to glance at the prone figure beside him.

Oaths burst from the whites almost simultaneously. Tug and Crawford threw themselves from their horses and ran forward revolver in hand. Not a native moved.

Tug was the first to reach the group. He seized and turned over Takaki.

"Dead!" he muttered incredulously, looking up as Crawford reached him.

"Ah'll fix th' hound o' hell," bellowed the sergeant furiously, and pointing his revolver at Zuloki's head—the eyes of the native never blinked—he seized him roughly by the arm.

"Get oop, ye black!"

Again the witch doctor's hand shot out. Tabu!" he menaced.

The sergeant gasped. Zuloki sank back upon his haunches, imperturbable; as the revolver went off in the air the white man swayed, writhed, sagged and collapsed even as the black sergeant had done.

"*Ough!*" came the same subdued grunt from the natives, and a shriller note of superstitious terror from the goggle-eyed Black Watch.

III

UTTERLY confounded, Tug stood staring at the form of his commander, who lay crumpled up, one arm doubled under him, the other sticking out in a grotesque gesture. Time stood still. Everything seemed to be hushed, waiting, listening.

Then he realized that Jock was dead. But how? It was incredible. He had seen distinctly that the witch doctor had not actually touched the sergeant. The sinister black finger had merely pointed into Jock's face, almost, but not quite touching him between the eyes as he had stooped to drag the chief to his feet. Besides, even if the wizard had touched the men, no man can kill by pointing, or even touching.

Despite his white training and scorn of superstition a horrid cold feeling crept beneath his skin. Takaki, the black sergeant, must have known that he was going to his death, hence the "Bayete" salute.

Impossible? Yet it had been done; twice.

As Tug's brain began to function again the first impulse was to shoot both chief and witch doctor, and order the Black Watch to help wipe out the kraal to avenge his murdered comrade. But reason vetoed the natural instinct; such an act would inevitably bring about a general rising entailing the massacre of many whites scattered about the countryside; also he was sworn to uphold the law; was indeed its representative.

"I'll get you yet, you black swine!" he suddenly exploded, and pointing the revolver at Zuloki's head bade him in the dialect to stand up or he would kill him. Tug was standing on the side farthest from the witch doctor. Zuloki palpably hesitated.

"He touched thee not," Tug heard the witch doctor whisper.

Then the chief rose.

"And you!"

The wizened wizard rose with more alacrity.

"Cover them with your rifles, boys!" commanded Tug, who as senior trooper was in charge, "and keep 'em covered. At the slightest attempt to escape or turn, shoot. But make 'em walk ahead, and for God's sake don't touch the beasts," he added hurriedly.

IV

MROVO station had not long been established and most of the buildings had wattle and daub wall. No regular jail had as yet been built. When Tug had made a verbal report to the commanding officer, who scoffed at the alleged magical powers of the witch doctor and was violently angry at the death of his sergeant, the prisoners were handcuffed and chained to the center pole of the forage hut, and a white guard mounted lest the Black Watch might be influenced by native superstition.

"Anyway," said Tug to his buddies as they went off to eat, "that cans the sacred stuff. It's some stunt of the witch doctor's; but just what, I can't get."

"Perhaps," suggested Huykers, "dey

would haf taken a chance if deir own peoples were looking, hein?"

"Yep, something in that maybe," admitted Tug. "Say, Dubois, did you see clearly what happened?"

"Yes, I tink I see. He raise 'is arm and say dat vord and—poof! Yock 'e fall! Der black sergeant I could not see because 'is back vas to me."

M'm. Neither of you fellows saw something that flashed?"

"Flashed? No. Vot was it like?"

"Just a tiny spark—like a spark plug contact? No? Don't know myself whether I saw it or not. I was knocked all of a heap. Must have been mistaken."

"You must have," agreed Pete. "For that's rot. Can't work up a theory of a nigger using a battery, and anyhow he'd have to carry some powerful battery to kill a man so quick.

"Guess you're right, son. That wouldn't hold even with a cub reporter," Tug admitted. "But I'll get that black murderer if the law don't. Poor old Jock," he sighed. "Well, hoof it, you fellows. The Old Man will be waiting in the orderly room with Bertie for official evidence. But by golly," Tug added, rising, "I've got a hunch that that guy with the bone regalia killed the old chief Matanga, and he and Zuloki framed it on the old woman and split the loot. I'll put that up to the skipper."

They collected their prisoners and marched them up to the orderly room, the first building in mud bricks as yet constructed, where, beside the C. O., was the Native Commissioner, Berthold, known as Bertie, a Colonial from Natal who spoke the dialect.

But the official interrogation elicited nothing new. Both prisoners denied that they had slain their chief; and the intended victim of the suttee, to the astonishment of all, asserted that her witchcraft had slain her husband, a deed calculated to gain the chiefdom for her son, just as Jock had guessed. She seemed very proud of the crime.

Then Zuloki and the witch doctor, to their utter indifference, were formally indicted on the charges of murder and attempted murder for trial at the Salisbury Assizes, and the woman charged with murder on her own statement. Tug, with another sergeant, nineteen white troopers and a company of the Black Watch, was detailed to leave at daybreak to bring in some of the *indunas* as witnesses.

That afternoon they buried with military honors the remains of Sergeant Jock Crawford.

Later as the men were returning from "stables" passing the forage store they heard a chant in progress.

"Myking magic!" said a Cockney called Jukes with a derisive laugh. "We'll all be dead in the morning, see if we ain't."

"Aw, quit it!" snapped Tug irritably. "If you'd seen the show you wouldn't be so darned fresh about it."

"Oo-er!" mocked trooper Jukes. "'Ow much will yer bet they vanish in thin hair termorrow? Bottle o' dop? I'm gyme. Garn, yer ain't a sport. Any'ow, 'Hi'm on guard ternight so yer'ave a cinch ter win."

"Some smart Alec, aren't you?" responded Tug feebly, for he was deeply cut by the sudden end of the dour Scotch sergeant.

All that evening, for hours, from the prisoners' hut continued the wailing chant.

"I wish that old fool of a guard would make those rats stop that racket," growled Pete, who had already turned in.

"Got nerves?" inquired Tug. "Me, too, ole son."

The chant continued, maddening in its persistent monotony after taps. Once they heard one of the guards bang the butt of his rifle against the mud wall.

"*Didimalla! Didimalla!* Shut up!" he shouted. But the chant went on.

The next thing that Tug knew was the blare of the reveille. On the last bugle note came a sudden shout followed by voices talking angrily. Tug dragged on his pants and rushed out.

The first thing that he noticed was that the cone roof of the forage hut had sagged in strangely. He ran up.

Lying on the ground close to the wall of the prison hut and directly beneath the window were two bodies, one fallen across the other, Troopers Jukes and Mason.

Again Tug felt that chilly sensation, despite himself. He stared incredulously.

"They've gone, the swine!" he heard someone explaining to a new arrival. "The old man must have slipped his handcuffs and found a saw, for he's cut through the center pole—look at it!—and killed these two chaps, God only knows how!"

Beneath the window was another hole in the mud wall through which the murderers had made their escape. Evidently Mason had been killed first, and then Jukes had fallen into some kind of a trap when he came to see what was wrong.

But again—how had the guards been slain?

There was no visible mark upon the body of either man.

Significantly, both rifles and bandoliers had gone, too.

"There's only one answer to this," shouted Tug in a mad rage, voicing the feelings of all, "and that's go get 'em—the whole boiling, damn 'em!"

V

BOOTS and Saddles!

Half an hour later the troop was lined up. Only three fifths were mounted, the others having lost their animals by the prevalent horsesickness. Formed up behind them were the Black Watch, laggards running from their quarters buckling on their accoutrements.

Presently came the skipper, scowling savagely.

"Who the devil was the benighted fool who handcuffed those prisoners?" he barked.

"I did, sir," spoke up Tug.

"Hadn't you got the horse sense to see that the fellow couldn't slip his hands?"

"No, sir. He must have used grease anyway, probably from the other's wool. And besides I manacled them by the legs as well."

"Where in thunder did he get a saw?"

"Must have been left behind by accident, sir."

"Armory's the place for tools. Which of you men left it there? Come, speak up quick!"

"I—I dunno, sir," stuttered a smallish man, the mess cook, "but perhaps I did. I was a-sawing up some boxes there, sir, to make shelves for the mess hut sir, and maybe I forgot it. I'm sorry, sir."

"Sorry be damned! You've cost two men's lives. Sergeant-major, put that man under arrest."

"Notice he don't ask who killed Jukes and Mason," mumbled the reputed wag of the troop to another man, "maybe he's gone and forgotten it!"

But no one smiled.

"Wonder what he thinks he's going to do?" queried Tug of Pete, his riding half section. "If he tries to wipe their eyes he'll start a rebellion sure. Not that I'm kicking, boy!"

"Well," commented sober Pete, "with those leg irons they can't have got far by now."

As soon as they were out of camp came an order to deploy in skirmish order, the Black Watch in the center and the mounted whites on the flanks, with the hope of rounding up the escaped prisoners before they reached their village.

"Pah!" snorted Tug at this wily manoeuver. "Might as well try to catch a mosquito in the dark! Why don't he gallop right through and put a cordon round the village and pinch the elders before they know what's hit 'em?"

As he maliciously predicted, no sign of the fugitives was found; but fully half an hour before their arrival they heard the drums getting busy—their approach had been signalled. It seemed incredible that two shackled men had made the distance before them, yet the natives might have sent the hag ahead, or gone by short cuts only known to the natives.

On entering the valley in which the kraal was situated Captain Vickers ordered column formation. He consulted much with Berthold, but seemed very undecided what course to pursue. Finally he led the troop up and through the village to the great square. A few old hags and sore-eyed pickannies peered indifferently from neighbouring huts while the machine gun team unloaded their mule.

"Looks bad!" muttered the skipper. "What d'you think, Berthold?"

"M'm, m'm," mumbled Berthold whose wits always seemed rusty. "I'll try to get in touch with them and hold an *indaba*."

"I should burn the kraal, sir," suggested the sergeant-major, who was half Boer. "Teach 'em a lesson, sir, y'know."

"Can't do that," objected the Native Commissioner. "Isn't legal."

"Damn the law!" retortel Captain Vickers, pulling furiously at his mustaches. "The swine have murdered three of my men."

"Couldn't possibly sanction," mumbled Berthold, who as the Civil power had command, as far as native affairs were concerned, until martial law was proclaimed. "They're all up around in the kopjes."

"Well, get 'em down, sir, get 'em down!" snapped Captain Vickers disgustedly.

Berthold sent off one of his messenger police boys into the kopjes.

"If they won't come in," he added lamely, "I'll have to report the matter to the Chief Native Commissioner."

"And the C. N. C. will write across

Pioneer Street to the Deputy Assistant Acting Secretary of the Governor who will write back to you for further information, and you'll write back, and he'll write to the boiled shirt flunky of the C. N. C., who'll forget it for a week because there's a ladies' tennis tournament on; and then he'll write to old Byron at Zintos, who'll talk bosh to Munojumbo, and then about a hundred years hence we'll hear that the culprits have unfortunately fled across the Portuguese border—and between the lot of you you'll have spilled about as much bloody ink as there was red blood in my men's veins, sir!"

"Can't do anything else," mumbled Berthold rather unhappily as the skipper, fuming, flung himself out of the saddle and ordered the grinning troop to dismount and go easy.

"Sorry, Berthold," he added a moment afterward as the N. C., still sat like a melancholy pelican on his horse. "Not your fault, of course. Come and sit in the shade."

"I think," said Berthold slowly, "that we might be justified in confiscating their cattle if the two prisoners are not given up."

"Ah!" exclaimed the skipper, "that's something, anyhow. Ought to bring 'em to their senses and down here pretty quick. And the cattle are all down by the store in a bunch."

He gave the order for ten men to ride off and round them up and the others to offsaddle.

"That's the whichaway!" concurred Tug with delight. "I said ole Buffalo Bill's a regular fellow!"

SCARCELY had they heard the distant whoops of the round-up than they saw a tiny figure rush out of the store gesticulating excitedly. A long conversation ensued between one of the police and da Gomez—at least on the latter's side. Finally the trooper wheeled about and came galloping back to the village. He rode straight for the skipper.

"Yon lad," he reported, "says as t' cattle belong to him, sir."

"What's that?" exploded Captain Vickers.

"Yes, sir." The trooper held out a document. "Says as Matanga, t'auld chief sold 'em and here's t' papers."

The document was a regular bill of sale, signed with a wobbly cross with the words 'Matanga his mark,' and witnessed by Charles Dawson, a missionary who had a station some fifteen miles away.

"Dawson!" snorted Captain Vickers, and on general principles added, "Damn these missionaries."

On its face the document was perfectly valid.

"Bring that man over here," ordered the skipper after a short consultation with Berthold. "Think it's genuine, Berthold?"

"Looks it," said the Native Commissioner. "Although it does seem queer that a chief sells *all* his cattle. Do you know the signature?"

"Not from Adam's."

The men filed off to water the horses and when they came back da Gomez was there, spluttering excitedly.

"No, no, *Senhor Capitan*, you cannot take my cattle! Eet ees not my fault. Day vas bought for goots. T'ree year I trade—only for cattle; and I pay heem look after for me. Soon I begin large farm. Yes, senhor. Dat ees goot beel of sale. My friend Meester Dawson he vitnesses, yes, *Senhor Capitan*."

"Now look here, da Gomez," said Berthold, "you're hand in glove with these people. What do you know about this affair? How were those men killed? You hear them talk all the time."

"I not know notting, senhor. Vot, you tink dey tell me, a viteman? Ha! Ha! No, nevaire a native. I hear talk, yes. Dey say it was weetchcraft of der doctor. I do not know."

He looked like an excited baboon as the sweat rolled down his hairy face and his hands pawed the hot air.

"Damn you and Dawson, too," grumbled the skipper. "You may go."

Stalemate—that's all there was to it. Unless the signature was proved a forgery the police could not touch the cattle; besides, there was no object in doing so, for the natives would merely laugh. That they would come in from the bush not even Berthold really thought. However, Captain Vickers dispatched a man to Dawson's to corroborate da Gomez's statements.

Meanwhile Tug had been lying on his back in the shade of a hut, unmindful of native fleas, listening and thinking hard.

"Say, Pete," he commented at length, "I've got a hunch that that bill of sale's a frame-up. Bertie's right. It just ain't natural for a chief to sell all his cattle. Why, man, he'd have a stack of goods to

fill twenty huts. There's seven or eight hundred head there. It just gets my goat to see a darn gang of blacks put it over on a white. Why, here we are sitting around like a bunch of pelicans in a Louisiana swamp—and three of us gone west. To hell with this palaver; I'm going to fix something with some pep in it. Tug grinned maliciously and made straight for Captain Vickers, who was sitting on his saddle beneath a tree smoking and talking to Berthold.

"May I speak to you a moment, sir?"

Captain Vickers looked up and scowled.

"Oh, you're the damn fool who helped us into this mess, eh?"

"Yes," responded Tug placidly, "I guess I'm that same damn fool."

"What d'you want?"

Tug spoke quickly and to the point for possibly five minutes. The skipper forgot to put his pipe in his mouth.

"M'm. Not bad. What d'you think, Berthold?"

"Jolly risky."

"M'm." The skipper eyed Tug reflectively. "But if you can't get 'em out?"

"I'll guarantee they'll come out or else they'll never come out," returned Tug oracularly.

"Can you speak the dialect? Oh, you can, eh?" The skipper couldn't, although he had been ten years in the same country. "Well, you may do it on your own responsibility. Berthold's a witness. We'll be here in case you need help."

"No, sir. If the troops stay nearby there'll be nothing doing. The blacks won't come near the village."

"The man's right," assented the Native Commissioner.

"M'm. Well, all right." Captain Vickers held out his hand. "Good luck, my man!"

Tug looked at the hand, smiled, took it, and drawled, "Thanks, ole top!"

VI

HALF an hour later, after driving back the inquisitive women and children by a nominal search of the huts, the skipper gave the word to march and the police column withdrew, leaving two troopers with emergency rations and water armed with two revolvers each, hidden in the granary adjacent to the chief's principal hut.

Lying well back in the darkness, covered nearly to the neck in *rupoko*—a kind of millet seed—they listened for the last *clop* of a hoof in the rocky ascent. Some time elapsed before they caught the shrill chattering of women, who evidently had come timidly to find out what damage the whites had done, and who now expressed their astonishment in clucks and clicks that nothing had been touched.

An hour of sweaty, suffocating darkness passed before the two men heard what they had been waiting for: first, a distant bugle call signifying that the column was out of sight of the village; second, the high-pitched voice of a woman speaking to someone at a distance. By the phosphorescent dial on Tug's wrist watch it was just six o'clock, a quarter of an hour to sunset in these latitudes. Almost immediately afterward rolled the bass notes of a man's voice. The natives were returning to the village in a swarm, jabbering excitedly.

Cautiously the two troopers crawled nearer the entrance, which looked at an angle upon the chief's house, an oblong building after the white man's fashion with higher walls, a window and a high doorway. Behind the light fence which surrounded this hut they could hear the chief's wives chattering as they prepared their lord's evening meal; but Tug could not distinguish, so alike are native voices to a white ear, whether or no the old lady who had been rescued from the burning was there.

Suddenly against the orange and green of the short sunset appeared the slender figure of Zuloki and the bent one of Takini, the witch doctor; neither wore handcuffs nor leg irons.

"How did they do it?" whispered Pete. "Natives don't have files."

As if in answer, immediately behind walked the baboon-like figure of da Gômez.

"Little rat!" muttered Tug. "He's sure been hiding 'em up in the store all the time, I'll bet a wad."

"Let's rush 'em now," suggested Pete impatiently. "We can hold 'em up and shoot if they try to rush us. Which they wouldn't dare."

"No, no, Pete. I'm out to get the goods on 'em and clear up that mystery business. And maybe they'd play that same trick on us—whatever it was. They've done it three times, and I'm going to find out the how of it. Gomez is in this for sure, and at present we've got nothing on him."

The three suspects were followed at intervals by half a dozen elders into the chief's hut, to which food was brought by the women.

From the granary Tug could not catch anything save the murmur of talk, but as soon as night was wholly come he began a belly-crawl across the compound; leaving Pete, who couldn't understand the dialect, to cover him. He succeeded in reaching the back of the hut unobserved, despite the protest of some roosting fowls.

At the moment, Zuloki was demanding in an angry voice that da Gomez should fulfill some promise, that they should be supplied with more of something previously mentioned; and da Gomez was replying that it was impossible, and that the promise had been made for the next moon. The argument continued for some time between the two in the rambling native fashion, but the listener could not get a clue as to the object desired.

Then da Gomez, as if exasperated, suddenly announced that he would take his cattle and go. Sneeringly Zuloki asked if he were going to get the other *umlungus* to drive them for him? The Portuguese retorted that he had made his trade and wanted no more; that anyway Zuloki had no more cattle to trade.

"Nay, I have now my father's cattle," responded Zuloki. "Are they not sweet, too, in the mouth of the white man? Eh! but all whites are thieves. The Great Elephant hath many more cattle hungered for by thee. Are these not white words, O Sinuzi?"

"They are white words, O Zuloki," responded the man addressed. Evidently from the reply he was the emissary of Munojumbo, the paramount chief. "But the Black One is angered with thee in that thou hast raised the wrath of the whites ere the time was yet ripe to strike." Tug started slightly. "None but a foolish boy would have held the burning, knowing that the whites would send their soldiers to take thee. Eh!"

"'Twas the law of our ancestors," returned Zuloki sulkily.

"Who art thou to throw the words of the Black One over thy shoulder? Even so wouldst thou shoot at a bird and scare the buck? Couldst not await the word? Most wroth is he that thou shouldst have slain the three white soldiers and the black one by thy magic, for what shall madden a dog more than being bitten? Eh!"

"'Twas Takini, not I," objected the boy.

"Even so, art thou not chief? And thou, Takini, art bidden to the Presence to make manifest thy powers before him."

"'Tis past the time of the moon," excused the witch doctor.

But Tug, not waiting for more, wriggled back as swiftly as he dared; and touching Pete on the leg, led him into the recesses of the granary.

"Pete, old-timer," he told him, "its mightly serious. We're just on the edge of a general rebellion. That's what made Zuloki so fresh. That little Portuguese rat has been running arms, I'm dead sure. That's what his possession of the cattle means. The herd isn't all his, by the way; so that bill of sale's a fake to gain time. Seems old Matanga wouldn't deal; wanted to remain loyal apparently. I figure that's why they put him away. Now the kid's got a swollen head and has nearly busted the show by the burning and killing, and the big chief's after his scalp. Gomez is scared stiff knowing that instead of waiting till next moon, when all the harvest is in, they'll start right away. Now he hasn't got time to get clear. Now, whether they break out now or within a few days they'll surely raise hell for a time. You must make a break, right away, before the moon rises. Tell the skipper and get him to wireless headquarters. Then the big boss can have all the principal chiefs seized right away—Munojumbo in particular. Tell him he's all right."

"But you, Tug?"

"Me? I'm going to get these fellows—before they get me, anyway. But that don't count, man. Think of the hundreds of women and children, and what'll happen if we don't go through with it."

"That's right, but——"

"But nothing. Say, I'm dead sure they'll be having an *indaba* presently. Probably without drums, so's not to attract attention. Then you make a break for it. If you get caught I'll hear your shots and try to get the message through myself."

"No," decided Pete. "I'll go now before the moon."

"Right! And say, Pete, try to get old Buffalo Bill to snap into it and have the boys around this kraal at daybreak? Good luck, old boy."

Their hands met in the dark.

"*Hambe gahle*, go carefully!" returned Pete.

"Bet your life, boy," said Tug as his friend disappeared.

HE discussion within the chief's hut had become more excited. Da Gomez was demanding that his cattle should be driven on the morrow to the Portuguese border twenty miles away, but significantly his words were utterly ignored. In the little man's voice was the hysteria of panic; volubly he was reproaching Zuloki with broken faith, fatuously asking what they would have done without his aid. He talked until he was out of breath. Then Zuloki inquired of the emissary from Munojumbo when the word would go forth.

That, said the man coldly, will be told at the official *indaba*, as is the custom.

"If thou wilt do even as I have asked thee, then indeed shalt thou depart with that which is thine," said the witch doctor to da Gomez.

"That I cannot do," returned da Gomez frantically, "for I have no more, and to get some would eat up many moons even as it did in the beginning."

"Thou hast heard the words of the chief? Then am I no longer thy friend."

The effect of that simple speech was to bring from the little man a spate of words to which none made reply. His voice gradually faded into a whimpering.

Save for the noisy eating of the company there was silence. Then suddenly Zuloki said something sharply which Tug could not catch. Followed a stifled screech and the sound of scuffling.

Tug's hand fell on his revolver butt and he crouched. More movements and the low mutters of men; then someone began talking as if nothing had happened.

Came da Gomez's voice crying a native proverb.

"O Takini, he who breaketh his word breaketh his spear."

Tug slumped to earth again, musing. Glad they haven't killed the little rat, he thought. May be useful if I can get hold of him. Evidently the witch doctor needs something badly which da Gomez can't supply any longer. What can it be? Arms? That would be more in Zuloki's line. Something to do with the magic stunt? But even then I can't see what, for the darned witch doctor never touched either of them. H'm. I'll have to watch that moon.

The natives within went on talking in low tones so that he could only catch a word here and there. A sound of men stirring came from all about the village; they were beginning to assemble for the *indaba*. Presently the east showed the first smother of the moon. Tug was hoping that they would leave the Portuguese alone in the hut, but just then Zuloki raised his voice and a young warrior appeared who was told to guard the prisoner. The others rose and stalked away.

Tug listened. Da Gomez was speaking in a low voice to the guard; from one or two words Tug caught he gathered that he was fatuously trying to bribe him.

"If I can make that bird squeal he'll be worth something," decided Tug, and began to crawl swiftly round the western side of the hut, the chatter from the assembling warriors on the square helping to cover the sound of his movements.

Lying flat, revolver in hand, he peered into the denser shadows of the hut. The only light was the faint glow of half-dead embers, and the stars visible through a window on the eastern side. Da Gomez was still pleading with the guard, which helped to distract the latter's attention, and served to locate both.

On second thought Tug pushed his revolver back into the holster. There must be no shooting; this was a job for hands. He crouched ready, hoping that da Gomez would become more excited, but instead he began to despair and his voice fell to a whimper. Just then came a flurry of chatter from the square and a woman called to another. Slipping inside Tug inadvertently kicked a calabash.

He heard a guttural exclamation, but quite naturally the guard looked in the doorway for an intruder. He advanced until he stood against the stars, a tall lithe savage, the spear gleaming liquidly.

As tug rose cautiously the native ear detected the creak of clothes. Just as Tug's fist shot out, timed for a knockout on the jaw, he turned. The blow missed.

As the mouth opened and the spear arm drew back Tug leaped and had him by the throat, turning the shout into a choked squawk, as simultaneously he kicked the man's legs from beneath him to prevent him from using the spear.

They crashed to the floor. Tug dared not let go the fellow's windpipe; knew that his only chance was to throttle him. But the savage, oiled and painted, was wiry and powerful a piece of oiled wire hawser.

At first he tried to stab with the spear, but fortunately he had grasped the haft too far up for such close-quarter work.

Then dropping it, he used his hands, tearing at Tug's arms and at the same time struggling madly to get his knees under his opponent's belly. Once he almost succeeded and nearly threw Tug off.

The savage was making an infernal row with his nose, and Tug heard da Gomez cry out in the dialect, for the darkness of the hut he could not have seen that the attacker was a white man.

"Shut up!" gasped Tug at him.

The efforts of the young warrior were getting appreciably weaker, and Tug dug in his thumbs with the strength of desperation. Suddenly the man stopped lacerating his bare arms and tore madly at his face, seeking his eyes, which Tug protected by pressing his face against the negro's oily wool. Beyond tearing out some hair and wounding his scalp, the man was too far gone now to do much damage; and as Tug increased the pressure again the body went limp. But Tug held on a few minutes more to make sure. Then, panting, bloody, and sweaty, he released the warrior.

By the protruding tongue and upturned eyes the savage seemed dead, but to take no risks Tug gagged him with a strip of his own loin cloth.

"Who are you?" whimpered da Gomez, who against the lesser darkness of the door had discovered him for a white man.

"I'm Tug Wilson of C Troop. You know me all right," Tug told him, going over to where the little man lay in the western corner.

"You came to rescue me?"

"Like hell I did!" growled Tug. "Now listen here. I'm going to ask questions. You're going to answer 'em, and if you start lying you'll stop where you are. Get me?"

"Si, senhor, but——"

"But nothing. I'm talking—and don't talk so darned loud. You've been running arms?"

"Senhor, I——"

"That's enough. I know."

"No, senhor, I—I nevaire bring guns into der country."

"I know you have. But how did you fix it?"

"I nevaire bring der guns, senhor. Dey go fetch 'em in der Portuguese country."

"I get you. You mean you've brought 'em as far as the border and these fellows have been slipping over in bunches and bringing 'em in themselves."

"Si, senhor, but I nevaire——"

"Never nothing! Anyway it was a cute stunt. Since when has this been going on?"

"Only two years, senhor. I——"

"Only two years! Sacred snakes! They must have enough guns to fix an army corps. No wonder they're so fresh! Anyway that's that. Now, just what was the witch doctor so sore about—what was it you can't get for him?"

"You heard."

"Sure I heard." Da Gomez was silent. "Now, quit trying to think up something. Was it anything to do with the magic killing stunt?"

"I no understan', senhor."

"Yes, you do. Now stir up that think-tank."

As the slightest jingle of beads caught his ears Tug slipped across into the darker corner of the hut. Into the square beam of moonlight shining through the window entered Takini, the witch doctor. His mind evidently intent upon the prisoner in the corner, he did not notice the corpse of the guard until he stepped on a hand.

He grunted and sank upon his haunches over the body. As Tug leaped, almost seeing the cry of alarm in the man's throat, his foot slipped upon some discarded food and he sprawled forward on his hands.

The witch doctor jerked away his head just as Tug, lifting himself on one hand, thrust out the other to grasp the ancient's throat.

In that position, with his fingers within an inch of the wizard's neck, he was arrested by the glare of terror in the eyes revealed clearly by the bright African moonlight, and as he looked the witch doctor gasped and toppled over—even as his victims had done.

VII

TUG was too amazed to move, simply staring at the huddled form of the witch doctor. Dead he was as canned salmon.

As Tug, still incredulous, turned over the body it dawned upon him that his hand had been thrust out within an inch of the wrinkled chest as the witch doctor had turned his head, which was exactly the same gesture that the wizard himself had used in the two murders.

There was no trickery about it, then? Was it magic or had the wizard slain by suggestion? Tug had heard of the lethal effect of suggestion used by witch doctors the world over upon gullible brethren who,

condemned by them with suitable flummery, would in nine cases out of ten obligingly die of sheer fright, much to the prestige of the craft. Yet the latter couldn't have been so, for although the black sergeant might conceivably have been susceptible it was utterly impossible that superstition or suggestion should have killed hard-headed Jock.

Yet how had it been done? Here within a few minutes he had killed the expert himself by nothing more than the repetition of the same gesture!

Again Tug gazed at the upturned face in the moonlight, the glassy eyes staring in terror, frozen by sudden death, scarcely able to believe his senses.

Outside the murmur of voices indicated that the *indaba* was still in progress. Why had the witch doctor stolen back alone to see the prisoner?

"Eet ees magic, as I tell the senhor," came da Gomez's sibilant whisper.

In the intensity of the last few moments Tug had forgotten the presence of the little Portuguese.

"Bosh!" retorted Tug. "He—he just died—heart disease, I guess. Anyway he was old."

"Vot you do now, senhor?"

Somehow da Gomez's voice seemed cheerful, as if a great anxiety had been lifted.

"You make me loose, please?"

Tug hesitated, the back of his mind still occupied with the mystery.

"I think you'll do very well as you are until you get to Salisbury."

"Sal'sbury! You take me Sal'sbury?"

The first word was almost a scream of terror; the rest a savage sneer. He seemed suddenly to have realized Tug's object.

"Sure, my son, that's right where you're going along with Mr. Zuliko, too."

"How you take Zuliko?" demanded da Gomez.

"That's my business, I guess."

"S'pose I shout, yes?" threatened da Gomez.

"It'll be your last shout on this little earth."

Da Gomez remained silent, pondering.

"Hell, that was mighty careless of me," muttered Tug on a sudden, scratching himself, for the hut was infested with vermin. He stepped forward and dragged the two bodies onto the raised platform, which, covered with mats and blankets, formed the chief's bed. Then he stopped by the door and peeked out. From the square the continuous murmur of voices reassured him.

"Senhor!"

"Well?"

"Will make loose my arms, please? Dey hurt mooch and I cannot run way, senhor."

"That's so," agreed Tug. "No sense in torturing you, I guess."

He dragged the little man into the beam of moonlight. They surely had trussed him good and plenty. With a knife Tug cut his arm bonds.

"Oooch!" exclaimed da Gomez gratefully. "Tank you, senhor!"

Slowly he began working his arms and shoulders propped up against the wall. A flurry of chatter without distracted Tug's attention. As he went back to the door da Gomez made a sudden sound like a curse in his own tongue. Tug sat down just within the threshold to watch. Once he turned his head to look at his prisoner. He hadn't attempted to move, and was pulling a hand stiffly out of an inside pocket.

"Senhor! Will you come, please?"

"What for?"

"I want to show you someting."

"Well, show it!"

"You no can see dere."

"Yes, I can."

"No, senhor, please!"

"What on earth is it?"

"I show you. Come!"

Tug watched him suspiciously. There was a peculiar excited eager look in the goggly eyes.

"That'll keep."

"No, no, senhor," persisted the little man. "Senhor, I do know how dat weetch doctor he do magic kill."

"Oh you do, do you? Why didn't you find that out before?"

"I was frightened, senhor."

"Don't doubt it. But why can you now?"

"'Cos I tink better tell all."

Tug eyed him.

"All right. You keep it for Salisbury."

He turned his head away to peek out again, thinking. What was the guy after he wondered. Some treachery, surely. When the chief comes along he'll probably bawl and give me away; hoping to get his cattle back that way. Guess I'd better tie him up, and gag him as well.

Tug rose and strode over to the Portuguese.

"Vot you do?"

"Never mind what I'm going to do."

Just as Tug bent over him to pick up the native rawhide with which he had been bound da Gomez's eyes shifted as a poor

boxer's will, to the point of attack on his chest.

Thinking he had a knife, Tug struck swiftly with his open palm, a defensive chopping blow, simultaneously throwing his body sideways.

As his hand met da Gomez's he saw a tiny flash in the moon rays. Something terribly powerful seemed to stab him within the nose and the throat.

He gasped; and his lungs seemed on fire.

VIII

TUG was aware of a curious object shaped like a tombstone which towered before his eyes in the moonlight. Then he was conscious of a burning pain in the chest and that his mouth was as dry as a stone. For several moments he could not imagine what this strange object could be. Then driven by the terrible thirst he stirred—to find that he had been lying crumpled up on the floor and that the "tombstone" was one of da Gomez's boots.

A drink from the water bottle refreshed him and started his fuddled wits working. Da Gomez was still sitting propped against the wall, but with his head on one side. Tug thought he was dead until he detected faint, spasmodic efforts at breathing.

Picking up reality where he had been forced to drop it Tug glanced toward the door, whence came still the reassuring chatter of the *indaba*.

What had happened? He recollected the same tiny flash which he had thought he had seen when Jock Crawford had been killed by the witch doctor. He rose to his knees and peered at the semi-conscious Portuguese. One hand was lying palm up. On the tip of the index finger was a spot of blood, and as he looked something glittered—a tiny piece of glass embedded in the flesh.

Glass? Tug glanced at the floor. More splinters glittered, very thin, fragile glass, and among them was a globular fragment.

As he stared at them something of the truth dawned. The splinters on the floor and on da Gomez's finger were fragments of a glass capsule which had contained a very powerful volatile poison. By the chance of striking da Gomez's hand and simultaneously throwing his body aside, he had escaped the full force of the fumes; and da Gomez, too, must have only partially inhaled them.

Now he could see the whole trick. The hand was thrust forward to crush the fragile capsule directly beneath the victim's nose. Probably the operator at the time carefully held his own breath. This was what the witch doctor had been so urgently demanding, and which da Gomez could not supply. As for the former's death, the knowledge of the deadly effects of the gesture from a white man's hand—which he might have mistaken for da Gomez's—had killed him by sheer fright.

In an access of fury at the contemptible deed Tug furiously shook da Gomez's shoulder. The little man opened his eyes, gulped, made an inarticulate noise and grasped his throat.

"Here, you louse!" said Tug and thrust the water bottle at him.

He drank, grimacing painfully, and sighed.

"Now see here," continued Tug ferociously, "where did you get that darned dope from?"

Da Gomez, apparently still only half conscious, goggled at the fragment of capsule on Tug's finger.

"Speak quick or I'll blow your brains out now!"

"I—I make 'em," stuttered da Gomez.

"What is it? How?"

"Cyanide mercury. Make hot in tube. Catch gas," said da Gomez, with a certain pride as of a man speaking of his life work. "I no just soldier doctor. One time—Oporto—I am great doctor. Da Gomez not my name."

"I get you," said Tug slowly. "Guess you left your home town for your neighbor's health! What put you up to this trick?"

"Weetch doctor he want something kill no man know how. But I no make for heem use for white—only for black man."

"And I guess he paid well?"

"He geef mooch cattle, yes. Why not? You tink I want stop his damn country all my life, senhor? I, great doctor? No."

"Well," returned Tug, "I kinder guess you're liable to now."

The goggle eyes stared at him and then slowly the shoulders shrugged.

"I make meestake, senhor," he said. "I haf lost."

Tug drank more water, for his lungs and throat felt as if they had been scorched. Just as he handed the bottle to the prisoner a low ululation came from a long distance off among the kopjes.

Tug started to his feet and ran to the door. The cry was a native warning, and

now in high-pitched tenor the message was coming from kopje to kopje. The response in the village was immediate. Cries and shouts rang out from the square as the *indaba* broke up. Women were shouting and a general commotion began throughout the village. Zuloki's voice rang out in high penetrating tones of alarm, which told Tug that the police were surrounding the kraal.

Men were running in all directions to get their arms before the flight into the hills; for the Mashona are not given to stand-up fights, preferring a sudden rush, a swift massacre, and away. Tug was suddenly worried lest Zuloki might escape him by sending a warrior for his arms instead of coming himself. But just as Tug was hesitating whether to go gunning after the chief he saw him racing with lithe strides for his compound.

"The police have the village surrounded," Tug told da Gomez. "If you cry out when the chief comes I'll plug you sure."

Then an idea struck him, and he grinned. Jerking the body of the dead witch doctor from the chief's bed he stuck it full in the moonlight.

"There, that'll take the sand out of him!" he muttered.

Then Tug stood in the dark end of the hut. Ten seconds later entered the chief.

"*Ehh!*"

He had stopped in his tracks staring dumbfoundedly at the corpse of the witch doctor.

Tug stepped out from the shadow, a revolver in each hand.

"I arrest thee, O Zuloki. Thy magic is dead!"

The youth turned startled eyes on the trooper.

"The magic of the white is stronger than thine," continued Tug impressively. "Thou art my prisoner. Sit thee beside the other."

As if the death of the magical taker of life had chased his wits away, Zuloki meekly obeyed, staring at the upturned glassy eyes of Takini, the witch doctor.

WHY INDIANS WERE SCALPED

BACK in the days of the Indian wars, white scouts and plainsmen were severely criticized for scalping slain savages. Historians, treating of the wars in books written long since the last scrimmage was fought, scathingly denounce those who employed the knife against their foe; some go so far as to say that the plainsmen were as bloodthirsty and savage as the Indians themselves.

The old-time plainsmen who were in daily contact with primitive life; who were compelled to wrest from the very bosom of Nature the means to sustain existence and, at the same time, suffer at the hands of marauding bands of Indians, were doubtless made of sterner stuff than goes into the composition of the men of to-day. The practice of scalping Indians did not, however, arise from savagery upon their part; it had a saner, more practical origin.

An Indian—any Indian, of whatsoever tribe—dreaded losing his hair far more than he did losing his life. Well authenticated instances testify to the fact that they would, when wounded unto death, creep away into brush-piles, hollow-trees, and other cover, in order that their dead bodies might escape the mutilating knife. To the Indian, death means merely a transition to the Happy Hunting Ground, while losing his scalp means unspeakable disgrace. Hence, when a plainsman killed one, he took his hair, even scalping those falling before rifles other than his own.

As a matter of fact, the plainsman cared nothing for the scalp; it was the psychological effect of a scalped Indian upon his living brother he had in mind. He wanted the red man to know that he had to do with a foe who fought as he fought, savagery for savagery. That such tactics had the desired effect upon the Indian, is very well illustrated by the following—one of many like instances the old-time Indian-fighter knows and will vouch for:

A band of some two hundred hostile Pah-Utes began an attack upon an emigrant train on the Montana plains. It so happened that Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and Bill Drannan, none of whom need any introduction to the reader of Western history, had joined the train the night before, bringing with them some twenty-five or thirty freshly taken Indian scalps. When the enemy was sighted, and was as yet several miles away, Carson ordered the wagons corraled. Across the front line of vehicles, where the Indians could not fail to see them when they arrived, the scouts strung the scalps. The Indians came up, saw the scalps, realized that experienced fighters, as ruthless as they were themselves, were among the emigrants; fighters who could and would give a good account of themselves—and, moreover, use the knife upon such of the attacking party as fell in the scrimmage. They went away, leaving the train untouched.—E. P. W.

FORT WORTH

THE BEGINNINGS OF GREAT CITIES

By Eugene Cunningham

Endorsed by the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce

WITHIN a radius of a hundred miles of Fort Worth resides one third of the present population of Texas. But in 1841, when the first hardy white man built his sapling-walled hut on the shores of the Trinity River, all this region of rolling prairies, live oak dotted, of low, wooded hills and deep forests, was the favorite hunting ground of roving Indians.

The nearest court was at Nacogdoches, two hundred long miles away. The pioneer was constantly harassed by raiding savages from the present Oklahoma. No man dared go out to plow except with long rifle in hand.

With the ending of the Mexican War, the government took thought for its people engaged in pioneering this new state. General Scott was ordered to send soldiers to protect the Texan settlers and he despatched Major Arnold with a troop of dragoons to North Texas. Upon the present site of Fort Worth, on June 6, 1849, Arnold established his post, no fort, in strict military reading of the term, but a headquarters for his troopers. He named it in honor of his old commander, Brigadier-General Worth of Mexican War fame.

So utterly wild was all this region that it had small appeal for settlers. When in December of 1849 the State Legislature created Tarrant County, the struggling little settlement on Trinity Bluffs, huddling for safety beneath the carbines of Arnold's dragoons, watched apathetically while Birdville became the county-seat.

In 1853 the troops were withdrawn. Around the plaza the village shivered, so to say, in constant anticipation of the dread war-whoop. But somehow, from year to struggling year, it lived, even developed a municipal spirit—for by strenuous pulling of political strings the title of county-seat was wrested from Birdville. With three fiddlers atop the wagonload of records, Fort Worth came home to celebrate the coup with a truly frontier *fiesta*.

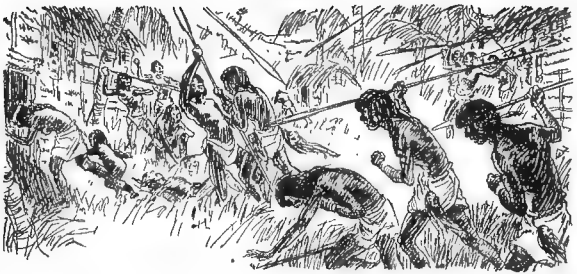
Birdville began immediately to shrink, but her rival seemed to take a new lease on life. In spite of Indian raids, continuing in the near vicinity until 1870, Fort Worth grew steadily. But always the future was rather doubtful, until after years of financial difficulties, of alternate hope and despondence, the rails of the Texas and Pacific entered the town in 1880.

Now came the boom-years. The railroad brought in a flood of rough, two-fisted, quick-shooting newcomers who boosted the mortality-rate immediately. For Fort Worth was a frontier-settlement in real earnest, the restricted habit of the East meeting here the ungoverned freedom of the open plains. In the old Pioneers' Rest Cemetery today, the history of the change may be read upon the reeling cypress headboards.

"Killed by Indians between Fort Worth and Dallas" yields to many a record of "Shot in a Street-Fight," "Died from Knife-Wounds" and similar illuminating inscriptions. In the river-bottom behind the courthouse, "Horse-Thief's Oak" not infrequently justified its sinister title.

Ranches and farms were creeping in upon the town. The cattlemen of the "neighborhood" made it their depot of supplies, as they do to this day. Traders in buffalo hides, tongues and meat, thronged here. In a single year Fort Worth received more than two hundred thousand hides. They filled the warehouses and overflowed to carpet vacant ground. The general merchants prospered with the success of farmer, rancher, and townsman. By leaps and bounds Fort Worth grew, a roaring infant with whisky in the nursing-bottle.

Buffalo-hunter and mule-skinner; rancher and farmer; lean, hard-working settler and floating desperado; preacher and gambler; staunch pioneer mother and harpy of the dance-halls; Texas Ranger and horse-thief; the crack of six-guns and the voice from the pulpit; the rattle of poker chips and the jingle of honest money on 'Change; oath and prayer; gambling and buildings—Of all these contrasting, conflicting elements, blended with the bold, prophetic pioneer-spirit that looked—and looks—far into the future and built four-square to that high, clear vision, was the Beginning of Fort Worth.



THE TRAIL BREAKERS

By OSCAR SCHISGALL

Author of "The Jungle Convert" and "The Feast of the Seven Women"

Explorers they were, scientists hunting specimens—but first of all they were white men; and a white man's first mission in the jungle is to make friends, to leave an open trail for the pioneers and settlers who will follow him

CLOSE to the banks of the Rio Tapaoa, where the deep shade of overhanging trees offered a promise of coolness, six canoes advanced slowly against the sluggish current. They progressed two abreast, the three white men of the expedition reclining in the leading crafts and squinting over the stream, which dazzled their eyes with its reflection of blinding sunlight. Brown-skinned half-breeds—*caboclos*—sweated freely as they plied the paddles, and their naked backs, shining with perspiration, emitted a nauseating stench which seeped even through the scent of the white men's tobacco smoke.

The other canoes, each propelled by one glowering *caboclo*, were loaded with supplies: food, tents, rifles, cameras, books, medicine, and cheap though gaudy gifts with which to purchase the amiability of native Indians. From the half-breeds, working rhythmically, not a sound came to disturb the heavy silence of the jungle—a menacing silence that weighed upon one as forcefully as the heat. Occasionally the squawk of a startled flamingo or of a giant jabiru stork tore raucously through this oppressive quietness as the huge birds, terrified by the presence of man, splashed and flapped in wild confusion and flew awkwardly from the shore to safe oblivion among the tree-tops; or perhaps there was the screech of a green parakeet as it darted across the narrow river, a streak of vivid color that vanished into the thick growth of impenetrable vegetation; sometimes, too, the happy chatterings of monkeys rattled through the sultriness. But these were all. There was not another sound. The Americans moved through ominous, depressing silence, terrific heat, an air of subdued danger. So strongly gripped were they by the spell of the tropics, that when they spoke they seldom raised their voices above a murmur.

Owen Hatcher, who called himself the literary observer and recorder of the expedition, glanced toward the canoe at his side which carried, besides its two *caboclos*, the white-haired Professor Dinsmore Somerville and the plump Lester Craig.

"This," said Hatcher, "is the fifth voyage I've taken into the wilderness. It becomes a habit, a mania, exploring; you'll find, after you return to civilization——"

"If we return to civilization," corrected Craig, with a snort.

"You'll find that a lure will persist. You'll want to come back. Yes, in spite

of this heat, in spite of everything, you'll want to come back. And, doubtless, you will—as I have. It's in my blood."

Professor Somerville, theoretically in command of the expedition, nodded as he pressed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"I can understand that, Hatcher. Once an explorer, always an explorer, hey? Well, this is my first venture. I shall look to you for instruction."

Hatcher shrugged.

"I don't know what service I can give," he said dubiously. "I've never come along this river before; I don't know anything about it. God knows what types of savages we'll meet. But remember—" he frowned as he stared across the water to the accompanying canoe—"remember that the white man has, above all things, one great mission here: he must leave friends when he departs, not enemies."

From Lester Craig flowed a long sigh. He was, both by nature and by inclination, a chronic pessimist; invariably he visioned disaster as the culmination of any precarious undertaking. And yet this Craig, when actually confronted by peril, could display courage and energy that were amazing in one who forever predicted darkest gloom. This Hatcher knew, and he was not unduly concerned with the plump little man's plaint.

"Leave friends! Do you mean to say we have to go around shaking hands with every tribe of head-hunters we meet? Listen, Hatcher, this is not a peacemaking trip. This is a scientific expedition. For my part, I think we ought to find a good spot somewhere, pitch camp, complete our researches, and get out of this jungle before some of your would-be friends see us and decide to make a meal of white flesh."

Hatcher smiled. Before answering, he lit his pipe and blew smoke at a mosquito that had settled to rest upon his sleeve.

"Don't misunderstand me, Craig," he said. "I am not advising that we roam around looking for savages. Hardly. But I do say that if we run across them, we must do everything possible to win their trust—not only to save our own skins, but to save those of future explorers who come here."

His face hardened suddenly, and he shifted his gaze from Craig to Professor Somerville.

"After all, we are only the forerunners of others—the pioneers—the trail breakers," he continued quietly. "When this territory is mapped out and known, other white men will come—settlers. It is up to us to make the country safe for them. I know these Brazilian savages, Professor. I know some of them, anyway. And I know that they never forget. If a white man antagonizes them, they remain forever the enemy of all white men. If they are befriended, their friendship endures. Why, do you know—" he bent toward the others—"some travelers investigate, before entering wild territory, what type of civilized men preceded them. If cruel or stupid men went first, these travelers deliberately change their course."

"I suppose," challenged Craig, "that Professor Lenover's expedition, two years ago, was composed of cruel or stupid men!"

"We-ell, I don't know. They were—unfortunate."

Hatcher gazed down into the bowl of his pipe. For a while he smoked moodily, while the canoes went on in their slow, steady progress against the stream. The mention of Professor Lenover's calamity threw him into temporary uneasiness.

LENOVER'S party of six white men and twelve *caboclos* had started down the Rio Tapaoa in January. For two months no word was received from them; and then, one morning in April, a crazed, famished, enfevered *caboclo* had staggered into the town of Arima at the junction of the Tapaoa and the Rio Purus. The dying man had fallen at the feet of a townsman and had whispered hoarsely that the Lenover expedition had been massacred by head-hunters when it had dared to penetrate a branch of the Rio Tapaoa.

"The Lenover crowd was not stupid or cruel," Hatcher admitted. "It was indiscreet. In this country a man may never be molested if he remains on the main stream; but if he goes snooping into little branch-creeks, he goes into the face of trouble. The savages build their villages along those tributaries; they hide deep in the jungle. Those creeks are their domains, and the white man must content himself with a view of the main stream. If he penetrates—well, Professor Lenover penetrated."

Lester Craig stretched his legs out before him, rocking his canoe with the movement.

"I think," he declared, "that we're a

bunch of idiots for coming along this Rio Tapaoa. Why didn't we choose another place? We knew Lenover met death here."

It was Professor Somerville who explained.

"My dear Craig, this river is practically unexplored. That is why we chose it. I expect to gather a valuable collection for the museum."

"Unless the natives gather a valuable collection of white heads for their museum," glumly interposed Craig.

After that warning, he lapsed into silence; and the others peered out over the shimmering river and wondered secretly whether they ought to permit themselves to be influenced by his pessimism.

At this point the Rio Tapaoa was perhaps a hundred yards wide—a flow of scintillating sunshine. Its banks were dense with jungle growth—black and green walls of parasite-bearing trees and shrubs that pressed down to the very brink of the water. So closely were vines tangled about each other that it was impossible to gaze more than a few feet inland.

Above the wilderness a clear, blue sky quivered with heat. One could stare upward and see the undulating waves of hotness. Sometimes, high in that blue haze a black spot would glide into sight. That, Hatcher had said, was a vulture winging its way toward some carcass.

In spite of the heat, however, and in spite of all possible danger, Professor Dinsmore Somerville found himself in a naturalist's paradise. For him there was always excitement. Though he was a short, slender man with hair already white, his gray eyes were still as keenly observant and as brilliant with enthusiasm as they had been in his youth. In his pursuit of specimens, he was indefatigable. What mattered it if perspiration were oozing from under his sun-helmet, or if his drenched shirt were clinging to his back, or if his boots had sunk, for an instant, into sucking mire? He was filling boxes with treasures. .

In one of the supply canoes lay the skin of an alligator which he had shot as it floated in a pool. Near it was a rare trumpeter bird that Lester Craig, a skillful taxidermist, had stuffed beautifully. And, preserved in a jar, was the coiled body of an electric eel which the professor had been forced to lift out of the river with a net while Hatcher shot the fish, lest contact with its live body paralyze the muscles of its captors. A valuable collection it promised to be; Professor Somerville was jubilant.

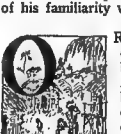
Craig, on the other hand, sat in moodiness. He had come as the professor's assistant, and for a time he had been quite thrilled with the prospect of adventure. Now, unfortunately, he was the victim of an energy-sapping sun. Zeal as well as cheer had been drawn from him by the heat. But he remained, nevertheless, a reliable and bold companion.

Though still a young man, he was slightly bald. The tropics had reddened his round face, until it was covered with a glaring ruddiness. He was the only one among the whites who rivalled the toiling *caboclos* in perspiring. Continuously his countenance was wet, and his white clothes nestled moistly against the curves of his fleshy body. Frequently and earnestly Craig roused himself from his lethargy to denounce the quest for tropic specimens as hazardous and suitable only for fools; but the others could peer under his outward indignation; and there, within the man, they saw a scientist quite as eager as his fellows to wrest the jungle's secrets from the wilderness.

"Craig is one of those men who are never happy unless they are grumbling," the professor had warned Hatcher. The professor was right.

As for Owen Hatcher, his connection with the Somerville expedition was vague. At thirty, he was considered an authority on the Brazilian hinterlands; two volumes of his descriptions stood in American libraries to testify to his knowledge. He was a tall, imposingly built man with broad shoulders that drooped slightly; and a long, serious face. For one who had lived so long away from civilization he was astonishingly immaculate. It was his custom to shave daily, even in the jungle.

Hatcher's lean countenance was bronzed by the sun, and his lips were thin and dry. But there was about him an air of firm confidence that spoke louder than his books of his familiarity with the jungle.



ORIGINALLY this party of explorers had numbered five white men. At Arima—the last village they had passed, eight days before—one of them had succumbed to fever and had been taken back to Manoas by a companion. And so, left to themselves, Somerville, Craig, and Hatcher had decided to push on

through the Rio Tapaoa, seeking to find what civilized man had never found, and not knowing definitely what they sought. The professor characterized their goal as "unusual specimens for the museum." Craig called their goal "stupid recklessness." And Owen Hatcher thought of it as—adventure.

Throughout the hot day the double line of canoes slipped up the Tapaoa, always clinging close to the shore so as to enjoy the shade of sprawling trees, and always defying the slow current. Professor Somerville saw much to thrill him. A cayman vanished in the water just before the scientist's rifle could stop it; an immense jaraca snake that appeared for an instant on the banks scurried off into the undergrowth; two egrettes flaunted their plumes on high branches; and once he aimed at but missed a surprisingly small tapir that had ventured to the river's brink.

"A marvelous country!" he declared.

"Only thing marvelous about it," growled Craig, "is the length of these blamed hot days! Isn't it about time we found a camping place for the night?"

Owen Hatcher nodded. It was six o'clock, judging from the position of the sun; he called a command to the *caboclos*.

A half hour later, on the opposite shore of the stream, they saw a clear patch in the jungle growth, and toward it they directed their course. But they had crossed scarcely a quarter of the distance when Hatcher exclaimed, "Why, there's a branch of the river over there! Just at the side of that clearing—see it? Its entrance is obstructed."

The others peered at the discovery. They saw a narrow path of water, no wider than a hundred feet, reaching back into the wilderness. The astonishing thing about the creek was that its mouth was almost completely hidden from view by a stretch of parasites that appeared, to the casual glance, to be part of the jungle.

"How on earth did those things grow in the water?" demanded Professor Somerville.

"They didn't grow there!" replied Hatcher, his voice strangely excited. "They were placed there."

"Eh—placed?"

"Yes. It's an Indian trick. That creek probably leads to a native settlement far inland, and they've attempted to conceal the route to the place."

"Let's move on to another camp-site. No use tempting the fellows," Lester Craig urged hastily.

From Owen Hatcher came a reassuring laugh.

"Don't be worried, Craig. They won't get your head tonight. That settlement is probably miles and miles inland. We'll be quite safe in camping here."

"That's what Professor Lenover must have thought before he lost his scientific head," mumbled the pessimistic Craig. But he proffered no further objection to landing at the inviting spot.

Immediately the *caboclos* busied themselves in preparing the camp; a fire was built close to the shore, the small tents were put up, and food was drawn from waterproof bags. Hatcher and Craig helped the half-breeds, while the professor wandered off in search of nature's curiosities.

Fifteen minutes later he returned, heralded by a yell which caused Hatcher and Craig to spring toward their rifles. There was a trampling of underbrush, a succession of shouts, and the professor lunged into camp as if he had been pursued by a jaguar. His face was flushed crimson; his eyes were wide and flaming.

"Look at what I found!" he cried as he rushed into the group about the fire.

The others stared. In his hands, which trembled queerly, Somerville clutched a canteen.

"Where did you find that?" demanded Hatcher, resting his rifle on the ground, and gaping at the thing the scientist had brought.

"In a small pool up the creek. It must have floated down with the current. A canteen! That means civilized men have been up that way."

"It's corked," observed Craig, stirred despite his gloomy expression. "Corked with a piece of wood."

The *caboclos* had gathered about the white men in a prattling group. Every eye was fixed upon that mute sign of civilization, while forgotten bacon sizzled over the fire.

Nervously Professor Somerville tugged at the wooden stopper which had been pushed forcibly into the canteen's opening. After a few pulls he extracted the thing and saw that to it, on its inner end, had been tied a piece of string made of fibre. The string led into the canteen.

"There must be something in it," said Hatcher quickly. "Draw out that string, Professor."

As steadily as he could with his shaking hands, Somerville obeyed. Out of the canteen came a queer thing—a palm-leaf rolled and bound like a scroll.

With increasing nervousness impairing the efficiency of his fingers, the professor flattened the leaf on his raised knee. He gazed at it and held his breath.

Craig, bending forward eagerly, spoke in hushed, faltering tones.

"Why—why, there are words scribbled on it. Looks as if they'd been scrawled with charcoal or something. Read it!"

It was Hatcher who snatched the strange letter from the stunned professor and held it up to be deciphered. On that leaf were faded words, scarcely legible now; but after a few minutes of study, during which his heart thumped loudly, he succeeded in reading, while the listeners looked at each other with dumbfounded eyes, and grew pale.

This is April 23, 1920. I am being held a captive by a tribe of savages who call themselves, I think, the Huamus. Their settlement, where I am now in slavery, is perhaps a hundred miles up the first branch of the Tapaoa. It is a sheltered creek that flows into the river about eight days' journey above Arima. The rest of my party have been killed and beheaded by these savages. I am being allowed to live because the chief wants me to teach him the use of my rifle and because, I think, he wants a white slave. How long they will spare me, I do not know. I write this at night, when my guard is dozing. To run way is impossible for me; I shall either die in the jungle or I shall be recaptured. I must wait in the hope that the current will bear this message to white men. My canteen hung around me when I was captured; may it serve me now! In God's name, come immediately, you who find this. Bring a force of Brazilian troops, for the Indians are strong. Theirs is the second settlement along the creek. The first settlement is that of the Juamatus, also headhunters and enemies of these Huamus. But the first were friendly to our party. I shall wait with prayers that Heaven will deliver this note.

Dwight Lenover.

CROSS the palm-leaf letter which Hatcher held, the three white men gaped at one another. Behind them the *caboclos*, who had heard and comprehended, fidgeted uneasily and muttered. The campfire crackled merrily, while the bacon sizzled to uselessness over it. Food was, in that moment forgotten; heat was forgotten; everything was forgotten save that Professor Dwight Lenover had sent this desperate plea to civilization.

Reports, then, had been inaccurate; the entire expedition had not been slaughtered.

High above the tense group twilight was painting the tropic sky with blazing daubs of color. Crimson and orange flowed into blue and green and yellow, until all finally melted to pale gray; then sudden darkness. More heavily than ever the jungle pressed down upon the explorers with its oppressive quietness shattered only by the distant squawk of a heron.

Hatcher bit his lip and scowled. His hand rubbed over his long, solemn face.

"Well," he whispered, "this changes our plans."

Professor Somerville gulped.

"What shall we do?"

"Do?" ejaculated Lester Craig, pointing at the leaf. "There's only one thing we can do! We'll start back for Arima and bring troops, as the letter asks us to do. But—you can be sure we're too late—much too late."

Hatcher gazed away over the river.

"That message was written in April, 1920," he murmured. "More than two years ago. I wonder if Lenover can possibly be alive now?"

"He must have died or been killed long ago," asserted Craig.

"Unless he was kept, as he says, in slavery."

Again they fell into silence, an uncertain silence which lasted until Somerville queried, "Well, shall we start back for Arima?"

"Of course," vehemently advised Craig.

But Owen Hatcher slowly shook his head. His eyes narrowed, and he turned his stare from the river to his companions.

"No, we won't go to Arima," he said very softly. "It takes eight days to reach the town, eight days more to return; that means sixteen days during which Lenover suffers longer, if he is still alive. No, we won't go to Arima. We'll send two *caboclos* back for help from the garrison. And we——"

He paused. Somerville's pallor changed to a yellow tint, while Craig actually gasped.

"We'll do what?" he demanded.

"We," said Hatcher quietly, "will go up this creek to find Dwight Lenover."

His announcement stunned the others.

Even the half-breeds ceased their repressed jabbering and eyed him with terror. But Hatcher was calm and quite self-possessed. Obviously his suggestion had been founded on deliberation, not on impetuous bravado.

Lester Craig regained his voice first.

"Hatcher, you're crazy! Our party is too small. It's like putting your head into a lion's mouth. What good can we do if we go up that creek? Three men can't attack a tribe. It's ridiculous. It's committing suicide. I say we ought to go to Arima."

Timidly, in faltering tones, Professor Somerville endorsed this opinion. Hatcher, however, refused to yield. He held the palm-leaf up to the others' view. With soft emphasis he explained his decision.

"I have been in this wilderness for many years. I have learned several things, and among them is the law that white man must stick to white man, regardless of what the dangers may be. It's for the common cause. Here is Dwight Lenover, possibly alive and praying daily for help. We are nearest to him—we are his own people. It is our duty to rush to him as speedily as we can. Get troops? Of course. Two *caboclos* can do that. Sixteen days may mean life or death to Lenover."

"For us those sixteen days mean certain death," persisted Craig.

"Perhaps—but not certain. Lenover says here that the first settlement he came to was friendly. What does he call them?" He perused the fantastic message. "Yes, the Juamatus. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that if we act wisely, we can earn the friendship of that tribe ourselves. We have plenty of gifts with us. So far we shall be safe. Then, if we push on to the Huamus, who have captured him, we may even be able to buy their good will with our knick-knacks. I have done it before, with other tribes. If we find Lenover alive, we may contrive some bargain to free him."

During the debate, Professor Somerville had been scowling at the ground, listening to both sides of the discussion, and trying to form a decision of his own. Now, when Hatcher addressed him abruptly, the white-haired little man looked up, his gray eyes flashing queerly.

"I—I knew Dwight Lenover," he whispered in unusually deep tones. "I think, Craig, that I rather favor Hatcher's plan. I feel he is right about the difference sixteen days may make. Yes, Craig, it may be foolhardy, but I'd like to push ahead. We can take the chance. It is worth while."

Craig emitted a disgruntled sound.

"Perhaps, Craig," Hatcher ventured, "you would like to go back with a *caboclo* to Arima, while the professor and I——"

Craig whirled around, anger blazing on his round features.

"Say!" he expostulated. "What do you think I am? Go back? The devil I will! If you and the professor are willing to move up the creek, I'll go, too. I'm part of this expedition. I share the risks as well as anyone else. And I'm not afraid. But I do believe it's a damfool idea! When do we start?"

Hatcher's hand leaped forward to grasp the arm of Craig. The tall man was smiling exuberantly. Despite his pessimism, Lester Craig was a sterling companion.

"We can't journey at night," said Hatcher, "but we'll start up this branch at dawn. A hundred miles, Lenover said. We ought to make it in less than three days."

As he nodded, Craig grumbled morosely, "Less than three days to live. Well, it's humane, anyway."

THAT night was a weird one in the history of the Somerville expedition. Few of the voyagers slept soundly. The three white men, within the shelter of the screened tents, tossed about on their beds of grass and found continuous slumber impossible. Craig sat up with a start every time he heard a suspicious sound in the surrounding jungle, and his hand groped toward his rifle. Yet there was no disturbance, no alarm.

Apparently the *caboclos* did not sleep at all; indeed, they did not lie down. Instead, they sat grouped about the fire which had been smothered with dry leaves so that it belched forth dense volumes of smoke to fight the swarming insects of the night. In the darkness those half-breeds crouched, whispering among themselves for endless hours.

Occasionally Owen Hatcher awoke to hear them. Once he called to them, saying that unless they rested they would be unfit for the morrow's journey. His command was ignored. The murmuring continued.

At dawn the camp was alive. Over the reinvigorated fire water bubbled in a coffee

pot; while the whites shaved beside the river, the *caboclos* prepared a breakfast that was more savory than any meal served to the explorers by the ambitious housewives of Arima. Squatting about the dying fire, the Americans ate heartily, though the prospect offered by the next three days should have affected their appetites. Hatcher, however, set a precedent by displaying good cheer, and the others accepted his mood stoically.

Only the *caboclos* appeared surly. They glowered and muttered among themselves, and said little to the white men.

The cool, gray dawn rapidly receded before the onrush of glaring, scorching daylight. Before camp had been broken, the torrid grip of the tropics was upon the wilderness. Drawing his helmet low over his eyes, Hatcher called to Zobago, leader and spokesman of the half-breeds.

"Have the men cut a path through those vines at the creek, Zobaga. We're starting in ten minutes."

And then it was that the *caboclos*' mutterings finally stopped, as though in response to a signal. The partly clad, brown-skinned workers halted, frowned, fidgeted, and motioned to Zobago. The leader hesitated, wet his lips. At last he gathered courage to speak frankly.

"Senhor, we no go this river. No good Indians up there."

For a moment Owen Hatcher stared in surprise. His companions moved up beside him.

"These fellows are no fools," he told them softly. "They know the customs of the savages. They don't want to go up the creek. As long as we remain on the Tapaoa, I suppose they'll come along. But they know the Indian's law."

Upon Professor Somerville's thin countenance settled indignation. He stepped forward, a little man addressing eight sunhardened toilers with aggressive authority.

"Look here, we hired you for this whole trip. You can't desert us like this. We need you."

"No go on little river," obstinately persisted Zobago, shaking his head. "Bad Indians there always. They cut head. No go there."

Somerville scratched his chin. Inspiration struck him.

"Listen," he said loudly. "We need you men. Nothing will happen to you on the creek. We have guns and ammunition, and we have plenty of presents for bad Indians. If you come along, I'll give every man fifty American dollars besides his wages. Fifty American dollars extra, if you come along."

The *caboclos* gaped, astonished. Their eyes widened to greedy circles, and they ogled one another in amazed indecision. Fifty American dollars for each man. *Dio!* The white senhor must be crazy. It was a fortune. Fifty American dollars!

They gathered in an excited group to discuss the magnanimous offer. Their voices prattled like the voices of monkeys.

The explorers waited. To proceed up the creek without helpers was an exceedingly distressing thought. Not that they could not paddle their own canoes; but three white men, unaccompanied, would in all probability impress even friendly Indians as an invitingly easy prey. Moreover, the professor and Lester Craig, strangers in the jungle, would find the mere physical strain of paddling all day a torture upon their muscles. The *caboclos* must be compelled to join their masters.

Suddenly Zobago broke from the whispering group. He faced his employers.

"All right," he said. "We go—for fifty American dollars to every man. But—" he lowered his head ominously—"if we see dead look in jungle, we go back."

Somerville glanced with a puzzled frown at Hatcher.

"What's 'dead look?' "

"They mean that if they see signs of danger, signs of death to themselves in the jungle, they'll refuse to go farther."

The professor nodded.

"Very well. Now, Zobago, you go break those vines, as the Senhor Hatcher ordered."

Thus, by dangling a lustrous lure before the mercenary *caboclos*, Somerville enlisted their support. To the half-breed, money is the consummation of life's desires.

"If I see a 'dead look' in the jungle, I'll feel like running away myself," Craig mumbled gloomily. "Can't blame the fellows. They're more sensible than we sentimental idiots who think we've got to be brave at any expense."

No one answered him. Hatcher was busily writing a note on a page of his small book—a diary which he attempted to keep carefully by recording the most minute events of each day, but which, unfortunately, he was frequently forced to neglect. He wrote a letter to the commander of the Brazilian garrison at Arima.

"Choose two men to bear this note back along the Tapaoa," he said to Zobago. "Those two need not go into the creek;

they'll receive only twenty-five extra American dollars."

In spite of the financial loss incurred, two *caboclos* readily, even eagerly, volunteered to carry the note to Arima. And Hatcher dispatched them with the warning that unless they made all the speed their muscles permitted, they would not receive the promised bonus.

ONLY five canoes started up the tributary of the Rio Tapaoa, twenty minutes later. In a long line, they skimmed noiselessly over the quiet waters. Their quest was the saving of a white life; their destiny was unknown.

Paddling on the creek was not difficult, for, besides the fact that its current was negligible, it was almost completely covered by a canopy of spreading branches. At no point did its width exceed a hundred feet; for the most part, it was no wider than half that distance, and the jungle trees stretched over it and dropped blessed shade upon the travelers. Here, away from the Rio Tapaoa, the tropic growth appeared denser than ever. Tree-trunks, joined by vines, bent over the banks, as though the vegetation was so thick that its walls were forced to bulge. Upon the eyes of the explorers that shaded stream cast happy relief, for the dazzling sunshine of the main river had been a torment. Here the men could look ahead in comfort, though their vistas seldom extended for more than a quarter of a mile; the creek bent and curved and twisted like a squirming snake.

Even with his mind obsessed by the real purpose of this daring sally into hostile territory, Professor Somerville could not quell his scientist's delight.

Squinting down into the shallow water, he saw aquatic wonders. Queer fish darted away at the approach of the canoes, but not so swiftly that the keen, gray eyes missed them. There were piranhas; small, carnivorous fish that could devour a man. He spied a water serpent which he was unable to identify; yet the very sight of the creature caused him throbbing excitement.

In the trees about the creek rare birds abounded, sprinkling the growth with splotches of brilliant color. Vain egrettes seemed to gather here in great colonies; parrots and parakeets cawed and screeched at one another in an interminable challenge for supremacy. Sometimes a proud heron or a stork stood on the banks until caution sent him away in noisy, awkward flight. And ibises were common among the wild life.

A swamp which they passed was thronged with blackbirds, one swaying on almost every reed. Their red wings lent gaiety to the drab marsh; and Professor Somerville managed to forget his urgent quest long enough to load a camera and snap a few pictures.

Through such natural beauty the party progressed, stopping only once to rest and eat; and an hour before twilight they found a clearing beside a swamp where they could camp for the night.

It was then that their first warning reached them.

Hatcher had just called a command to beach the canoes; he glanced back over his shoulder at the line of crafts that followed him. And as he straightened again, he heard a whiz in the air and a peculiar tap upon the side of his canoe. Startled, he looked downward.

In the side of the craft quivered an arrow.

Without awaiting a command, the line formed a cluster in midstream, while amazed eyes were focused upon that vibrant missile. It still quivered, its feathered reed pointing back toward the jungle.

"Good God!" hushedly cried Professor Somerville, as his canoe scraped Hatcher's. "What does that mean?" He was colorless, and his voice betrayed his terror.

Owen Hatcher plucked the arrow from its target. For a silent moment he scowled at it. Then he replied quietly, "That's an Indian signal for us to go no farther."

"It's the 'dead look' in the jungle!" exclaimed Lester Craig, wiping his round face which had suddenly become soaked with perspiration. "Say, did Lenover say these Indians were friendly?"

Hatcher fixed a hard look upon the plump man.

"They are friendly," he declared with vehemence. "If they weren't, they wouldn't send a warning. They'd send death."

"But, say, just because the arrow missed you——"

"It was intended to miss me. I know the signs, Craig. These savages know how to handle their arrows. If it had been aimed at me instead of at the canoe, I should have—received it. Furthermore, if it had been aimed with intent to kill, and the Indian had missed me, he would

have tried again. In fact, there would be a shower of arrows about us at this instant. We are being watched from that jungle."

Instinctively Craig shuddered as he glanced at the menacing growth. Not a sign of human life was visible. Yet eyes were looking out upon the expedition, cruel, savage eyes. To Craig the tropics seemed, of a sudden, to be filled with chills.

"We—we'd better turn back," he said.

Hatcher's bronzed face flamed.

"No! I told you this is only a warning sent by friendly natives. If it weren't intended as a warning, all of us would be dead. One arrow, aimed not to kill—can the message be clearer? We're safe if we don't go farther."

"Then what'll we do?" asked Professor Somerville, almost whimpering in his nervousness.

Hatcher raised his chin.

"We're going farther!" he declared. "First we'll camp here for the night. We're safe here. No use moving now. And in the morning—well, in the morning we'll continue the task we set for ourselves. That's all. Beach the canoes, Zobago."

In tense, sullen quietness the five crafts were thrust up on the bank. Palpably the *caboclos* were distressed; as they gathered wood for the supper fire, they repeatedly cast anxious glances into the jungle, as if they feared to be attacked at any moment. But the work, under Hatcher's stern commands, went on without interruption.

When the colorful twilight was still half an hour away, the camp was ready. The tents stood in the clearing; and before them a merry fire crackled and spluttered while steaming pots hung over the flames in a pleasant promise of tasteful food.

While the others waited for the meal, in constant uneasiness, Hatcher took from one of the canoes a bag filled with gaudy knick-knacks. To the interrogative expressions of the professor and Craig, he explained,

"They've shown us peace, these Indians. We must offer our signs of friendship. Come along, if you want to see how it's done."

Rather timorously they followed him along the brink of the swamp for a short distance. After a few minutes' walk, Hatcher paused and opened his pack. Then he moved from tree to tree, hanging presents on every low branch. Gaudy beads he left there, strung into necklaces and bracelets; and numerous strips of gaily hued cloth which were, in reality, nothing more than rags.

"Now we'll go back to camp," he said when the bag had been emptied. "If, in the morning, we find these things gone, we'll know the Indians have accepted our friendship. If they're still here—well, we'll be unfortunate."

Night dropped upon the jungle quickly, abruptly. Sheltered by an arboreal canopy, the camp-site was in pitch blackness. To it neither starlight nor the glow of the moon could penetrate. The creek ran before it like a stream of ink.

And the white men, after cautioning the *caboclos* to alternate in an alert guard, crept into their tents.

The night seemed filled with incomprehensible sounds. Strange footfalls in the underbrush, distant howls that might have been the roars of jaguars or the yells of humans, breaking brambles that cracked noisily, splashes in the water caused, doubtless, by diving turtles. All these kept the men awake until almost dawn. But at last exhaustion conquered the explorers. They sank into profound slumber.

WHEN Owen Hatcher awoke, he lay motionless for a while and gazed out through the screened flap of the tent. He could see strips of sunlight on the water; it must be long after dawn. He yawned, stretched his arms. Then he sat up and sleepily rubbed his disheveled hair.

Outside the smoldering fire, covered with leaves, still vented heavy smoke to keep off the swarming insects of the night. Those leaves would have to be scraped away and the flames prodded to rejuvenation for breakfast. He glanced down beside him, where the plump, bald Lester Craig snored rhythmically; and he smiled. A good fellow, Craig, even if he always did predict calamity.

Slowly Hatcher rose and pulled himself out of the tent. He blinked as he straightened his back and kicked the fire. He looked around.

And immediately he was alert, vigilant, and exasperated. An oath sprang to his lips, and he spat it forth with wrathful energy. An instant later he had aroused Craig and the professor, who joined him in the clearing, their eyes hovering between sleepiness and consternation.

"The *caboclos* have deserted us!" snapped Hatcher.

He pointed to the shore. Only two canoes remained drawn upon the bank. Of the others and of the half-breeds, there was no evidence. The camp was, save for the three white men, quite lifeless.

Lester Craig drew a deep breath.

"The dirty, rotten, cowardly, sneaking, snaky hounds!" he said.

Professor Somerville stood aghast and white, his hair mussed and his appearance slovenly. He was staring at the spot where the other canoes had been beached.

Upon the long face of Owen Hatcher a grim scowl had settled. He held his chin; legs astride, he gazed down into the fire.

"At least they were decent enough to leave us two canoes well filled with provisions, ammunition, and gifts. We still have those necessities," he mumbled. "I guess that arrow last night frightened the cowards away. It was stronger than the lure of fifty dollars."

Craig, hands clasped behind his back, started pacing around the camp-site.

"What now?" he chanted. "We three simply can't paddle ourselves ahead into death. Lenover may be a good man, but he isn't worth three lives, is he? Besides, we don't even know whether he's still living. Look what's happened: our *caboclos* have deserted. The Indians around here have warned us to go no deeper into this wild hell. Everything points homeward. I repeat, we ought to go back and wait for the Brazilian troops before we string our heads on the loin cloth of some grinning savage. Hatcher, what do you expect us to do?"

He stopped his pacing. Owen Hatcher eyed him curiously.

"First," he replied, "I expect you and the professor to make breakfast, while I roam about and see what our friends have done with our gifts."

"Don't take it so lightly. There's death ahead of us."

Hatcher's features were very grave.

"There's Dwight Lenover ahead of us," he answered. Then he strode off toward the swamp, toward the trees upon which he had hung his peace offerings.

Craig, beating one fist into the palm of his other hand, turned to the professor.

"What the devil do you think of that man, anyway? Is he sane?"

Professor Somerville gazed at the shadowed creek.

"I think Hatcher is as fine a fellow as I've ever met," he said slowly, after a pause. "He refuses to ignore Lenover's plea, even at the risk of his own life. I'm sure, Craig, he would do the same for you and me. He—he's the kind that conquers the wilderness. I intend to stick by him, to do exactly what he asks of me."

Craig sighed wretchedly.

"Professor," he confessed, "I feel exactly the same way about him. I'd follow him any place. But I object to whatever he suggests because—because—well, damn it, somebody's got to retain a semblance of conservative caution in this party, or Hatcher would sweep us ahead blindly!" He muttered something. Then he said curtly, "Come, let's make breakfast."

Before the coffee was ready, Owen Hatcher returned from his investigation. Somerville looked up from the can of evaporated milk he was opening.

"Well?"

Hatcher smiled reassuringly.

"All the gifts are gone. Our friendship has been accepted by the—what's their name?—the Juamatus. As long as we stay here, within their domain, we are quite safe."

"But," protested Craig, squatting before the merry fire, "you say we won't stay here."

"Naturally not. We're looking for Dwight Lenover, aren't we?"

"Then we won't be safe——"

Hatcher moved off toward the tents.

"We'll see," he said. "I'd like to see some of the natives around here. They may have something valuable to tell us. We'll wait here a while, until I find some of these elusive Indians. They can, at least, tell us how far we are from the Huamus, and how to reach them. Meanwhile, gentlemen, I'm going to shave. Call me when breakfast is ready. To square matters, I'll prepare supper."

In such a way, unobtrusively and without opposition, Owen Hatcher assumed actual leadership of the rescue party.

THE morning passed without a hint of aliens in the vicinity. Not an Indian appeared; the jungle was silent and listless, though the chorus of noises from its denizens persisted. Professor Somerville availed himself of the pause in the journey to roam along the banks and to gather an assortment of flora over which he beamed and chuckled with

happiness. Strange berries he plucked with stranger leaves; out of the swamp he took red flowers whose name he sought to discover in a diligent hunt through one of the expedition's reference books. He was, for the time, blissfully forgetful of everything save the opportunity offered by a wealthy, generous vegetation.

While Craig lounged about the camp and smoked and gazed thoughtfully into the creek, Hatcher devoted himself to more practical pursuits. Rifle over his shoulder, he vanished into the jungle. Half an hour later he returned with two fat squirrels—he called them a variety of squirrel, though they were really as large as rabbits with bodies almost devoid of fur—and a well nourished bird.

"After you take the skins, Craig," he said, casting his prey beside the smoldering fire, "these will make a good dinner."

His arms filled with trophies of the hunt, Professor Somerville came back to camp. Silence and inactivity again. The men sprawled about the tents, while Craig lazily worked on his skins.

"When are your Indians going to show themselves?" he finally muttered.

"When they're sure we look peaceful," Hatcher answered. "You may not realize it, but we've probably been watched every second."

Craig shivered a little, and chewed upon the stem of his pipe.

It was almost noon. Hatcher himself was impatient, vexed by the enforced delay. They could, of course, have pushed ahead on the creek, but he wished to consult the friendly natives first; as he explained, to continue the journey in spite of the arrow's warning, without making their intentions clear to the Juamatus, would be an offensive, disdainful gesture apt to stir resentment. And they could not risk causing hostility.

"Always," he said, "the white man's mission in the wilderness is to leave friends behind him."

He had scarcely spoken when the quietness was shattered by the sounds of advancing feet—many feet, treading over brambles.

Impulsively Craig and the professor sprang to their rifles and held them loaded, ready for instant action. The two men stood facing the jungle, scowling and trembling. This was to be their first encounter with savage natives of interior Brazil, and they were quite ready to defend themselves. Theirs was, perhaps, the attitude of Minute Men waiting to shoot.

"Here come our friends," whispered Lester Craig. "I prefer bullets to handclasps." His voice shook hoarsely.

Only Owen Hatcher, though surprised, appeared at ease. He rose calmly, leisurely. He picked up his rifle and held it at port. But he did not tremble, and his eyes were not anxious. Hatcher had met Indians before this occasion.

A dozen brown men walked into the clearing and stopped some twenty feet from the white intruders. For the most part, they were entirely naked, though a few of them wore loin cloths fashioned of the gaudy rags Hatcher had hung on trees the previous night. Their bodies, apparently well fed, were smooth and gleaming. Well formed figures were theirs, erect, strong. In height they averaged slightly more than five and a half feet.

Queerly, it occurred to the professor that their features bore traces of the Orient; the eyes slanted almost imperceptibly, and the lips were not as thick as those of the negro race. Black hair, straight and shining, fell smoothly over rather handsome heads.

All of the warriors carried long spears, longer than themselves. Some of them wore, around their necks, the heads they had received from Hatcher; and two of them displayed, on their loin-cloths, small brown balls no larger than oranges; a close inspection of those adornments revealed eyes and mouths and noses. These were trophies of war, of a kind that made Lester Craig shudder as he beheld them.

One of the savages stepped forward from the group. Ostensibly he was the chief; taller and more muscular than his fellows, he bore himself haughtily. From his waist dangled three emblems of valor —enemy heads.

The chief drove the point of his spear into the ground, then raised his arms in a sign of peace. Hatcher understood. Immediately he placed his rifle at his feet and lifted his own hands high above his head. From under the visor of his helmet he peered intently at the visitors, watching every move.

The warrior spoke, uttering guttural sounds absolutely incomprehensible to the white travelers. Puzzled, Hatcher considered a means of establishing mutual understanding. And he found a base from which to proceed.

Waving his hand toward the group of Indians in the background, he said inquisitively, "Juamatus?"

Doubtless, he felt, Dwight Lenover had

taken the name from the savages' own pronunciation when he wrote it phonetically in his palm-leaf message. The surmise proved correct.

Palpably amazed, the chief started. His oval eyes widened. Then vigorously he nodded.

"Juamatus," he repeated, in deep tones. Pointed to himself, he added pompously, "Bajojo."

Hatcher glanced around at his companions.

"He probably means his name is Bajojo, and these are really the Juamatus Lenover mentioned," he told them. Turning again to the chief, he indicated himself and announced loudly, "Hatcher."

With introductions completed, he began the task of explaining to Bajojo the reason for his contemplated disregard of the Indians' warning. This, he sensed, was an important procedure, for to flaunt the brown man's caution by deliberately going into the interior, for no explicable reason, would be challenging his enmity.

Hatcher pointed to his canoes and then waved his hand to signify a trip up the creek.

T ONCE he aroused a response. Agitated, the Indians began jabbering; the chief prattled loudly as he swung his arms to suggest a journey back to the Rio Tapaoa.

"Well, they got the meaning of that easily enough," Hatcher said, smiling to Somerville. "Now to make them see why we are going up this stream."

That was a problem, but he attacked it confidently. He touched the white face of Craig and his own features; he thrust his finger toward the menacing interior.

"Huamus!" he said.

At the word, renewed excitement gripped the natives. Their chattering rattled in his ears. He saw them fidget about, lift their spears, swing the weapons over their heads. Even the chief, Bajojo, was stimulated to a few frantic gestures. He grasped the heads hanging from his waist. "Huamus!" he cried.

Upon Hatcher's solemn features a smile hovered faintly.

"Notice the effect of that word?" he said to Craig and Somerville. "Every man broke into warlike demonstrations when I mentioned the Huamus. Lenover knew what he wrote; these people are enemies of those farther inland. Those heads the chief is swinging probably are Huamu heads. Well, we're making progress. Watch me."

Hatcher tapped his own face and the countenances of his two companions; upon his fingers he counted three—and held up his hand to signify the result of his count. Then, while the puzzled Bajojo frowned interrogatively, and the other Indians pressed forward in deep attention, Hatcher lifted a fourth finger.

Beckoning the natives to watch this latest addition to his count, he repeated his touches upon the white faces. Again he waved a hand toward the interior and said, "Huamus!" And again he directed the spectators' eyes toward the fourth finger.

Several times he went through this maneuver; and suddenly the brilliant light of comprehension flashed to Bajojo's brown face. The slanting eyes shone. He quivered. Upon his own hand he counted four fingers, and the fourth he pointed upstream.

"Huamus?"

Hatcher nodded.

With something akin to awe hushing his tones, Professor Somerville exclaimed, "You've made them understand, Hatcher. You've made them understand that there's a fourth white man with the Huamus."

"They understand," Hatcher answered simply. "Now let's see what they'll do."

What the Juamatus did was startling. Bajojo rejoined his followers and incensed them into a jabbering, loud discussion. For several moments they completely ignored the white men; visibly some vibrant question was being debated, and Bajojo, possessing the most resonant voice of all, seemed to win the decision.

The chattering suddenly ended. With long strides, the chief came to the white men; he pointed to the tents, then pressed both palms toward the ground.

"I guess," ventured Craig, dubiously, "he wants us to throw our tents down."

"No," Hatcher corrected. "I think he means we are to wait here. That gesture means squat, and squat means wait."

To the Indian he nodded.

Bajojo pulled his spear out of the ground. He shouted a hoarse command. In a chattering crowd the savages scampered away into the jungle growth.

A minute later the camp-site was as silent and lonely as though not a human soul was within a hundred miles of the place.

Emitting a long, tremulous breath, Les-

ter Craig took off his helmet and mopped his wet forehead.

"Well, what the devil are we supposed to do now?" he demanded, squinting at the others. "I never went through a more trying interview in my life. Every second I thought those fellows would forget that we were friends. But say, Hatcher, you are a wonder with the sign language."

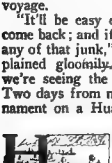
Vaguely Owen Hatcher smiled as he slumped down beside the remains of the fire. As unconcernedly as if nothing unusual had occûrred, he lit his stubby pipe.

"Sit down, gentlemen. We must wait. Those Indians have something in their shrewd little heads," he said, peering through the smoke. "They'll be back with some amazing plan pretty soon, unless I'm mistaken. We'll see."

Around the fire the three travelers stretched themselves in lazy comfort, though the excitement in their eyes belied the composure of their positions. They smoked. Fortunately their camp-site was in a shady retreat, for the blazing heat of midday was upon the tropics. Even the birds in the jungle had ceased their concert; only occasional sounds came from them. Upon the men weighed heavy, hot silence. To them it seemed pregnant with promises, or threats.

It was decided, upon Hatcher's advice, not to carry the entire equipment inland. Boxes, books, specimens, and non-essentials could be left here, concealed in the growth, to be called for on the return voyage.

"It'll be easy enough to stop if we do come back; and if we *don't*, we won't need any of that junk," the pessimistic Craig explained gloomily. "Personally, I believe we're seeing the last of this pretty spot. Two days from now I expect to be an ornament on a Huamu loin-cloth."



OURS dragged by; not an interruption issued from the jungle. The plump Craig had pulled his helmet over his face and was trying to doze on the ground, while Professor Somerville inspected some of the leaves he had gathered in the morning. And Hatcher read, as calmly as though he were in the safety of a library.

Then, at about four in the afternoon, his book suddenly dropped from his hands. He gaped at the river. With a prod of his fist he roused Craig; with his foot he touched Somerville.

"Look! Down the creek, at the bend. "Look!" he whispered.

Craig sat upright, sleep vanishing from his bulging eyes. The professor gasped. All of them reached for their rifles and rose, never averting their attention from the bend in the stream.

There, less than a hundred yards from their camp, a long line of canoes glided into sight. Like a snake it approached, silent and swift, twisting with the curves of the shore. At least fifty canoes were in that file, and in each canoe sat two brown-skinned Juamatu warriors. Their spears protruded from the crafts. Their faces, thrust forward as they paddled, were hard and stern, their slanting eyes no more than slits.

And in the foremost canoe sat the chief of the tribe, Bajojo.

Resplendent in two of Hatcher's necklaces, in bracelets, and in a crimson loin-cloth, Bajojo paddled as did his inferiors; ostensibly democracy governed him when on water.

The long, quiet line advanced, not a man uttering a sound. A hundred grim-faced warriors, paddling onward.

"They've come to get us," whispered Craig.

"But not to kill us," retorted Hatcher. "Indians don't attack from the open, regardless of how large their advantage may be."

"Then what the dickens——?"

Directly opposite the camp, the column stopped. Bajojo faced the white men. He lifted one hand to point to the canoes behind him; then he waved the hand toward the interior. His spear rose into the air.

"Huamus!" he called.

Owen Hatcher leaped to the bank; he stared while the Indian repeated the sign. And when he turned toward his companions, his long face was flushed with eagerness and excitement.

"Understand that signal?" he cried.

The professor shook his head in perplexity.

"The Juamatus are going to attack the Huamus. Don't you get it? Bajojo has gathered his tribe. There they are, armed. It must be one of their periodic raids on each other—done now for our benefit. Get it?"

The white men comprehended, while the flush of Hatcher's features traveled to the other two. Without doubt they had enlisted the aid of the Juamatus; friendship

for the whites and hatred for their enemies had inspired this warfare. There sat Bajojo, a grin on his brown face.

Owen Hatcher acted promptly. Calling to the chief, he stepped into one of his own canoes and signaled his desire to join this expedition into Huamu territory. Bajojo nodded permission, and the rescuers sprang to their opportunity.

As they broke camp and packed the tents into their two remaining craft, Hatcher spoke breathlessly.

"We've gained allies. Our gifts and our signs made them do it. We made them understand. Do you realize what it all means? By ourselves, we three would have been powerless against the Huamus in actual fighting. Our sole hope rested on gaining their friendship, as we gained friendship here. And from what Lenover wrote, that would have been practically impossible. Now, with the aid of these men, we don't have to fear Huamu strength. We'll be comparatively safe."

"Say," ejaculated Lester Craig, glancing up from the tent he was folding, "if you realized our danger all the time, why did you insist on our advancing?"

Hatcher smiled.

"Dwight Lenover was waiting," he said simply.

The canoes were packed. Eagerly the three whites—Craig and Somerville in one of the crafts, Hatcher in the other—paddled out to the waiting chief. He signaled to Hatcher to draw up beside him. But Hatcher shook his head and assumed a position behind the chief. To his fellow white men he said,

"Let him be leader. It's flattery. He'll probably enjoy it. We must be tactful."

Again Bajojo grinned. When the white men's canoes were aligned, he shouted a raucous command, and the long, grim line started once more, bound for the country of the Huamus, bound for war, bound for the rescue of Dwight Lenover. A hundred brown savages, and three white warriors.

WITHIN an hour it was discovered that Craig and Somerville could not maintain the pace of the others. The professor's white hair clung in wet strands to his forehead; his strokes became uneven. The stout Craig was panting and puffing laboriously, rivers of perspiration coursing down his round cheeks. Only Hatcher paddled easily, steadily, as efficiently as the natives.

Noticing the ineptitude of two of his recruits, Bajojo halted the procession while he ordered Somerville to change places with a warrior in another craft. Thus the wearied whites could sprawl in the bottoms of their separate canoes, resting, while brown brothers propelled them.

Both Somerville and Craig appeared delighted by this method. But Owen Hatcher frowned; he did not like to see his small party separated, even among friends.

Among those in the canoes Professor Somerville saw several extremely aged Indians whose features were lined and worn, and also a few young boys who could not have been more than fourteen. When an opportunity arrived he questioned Hatcher concerning their mission.

"It's an Indian custom I've seen all through the wilderness," Hatcher replied, paddling. "The old men are the wise ones; medicine men, and sort of priests. They don't do the actual fighting. As for the boys, they are what we might call apprentices; they merely watch the combat from a distance, so that they'll learn how to do it when they become men. As soon as the carnage is over, they swoop down like vultures to aid in the decapitating. It's an honor for a boy to be taken along. Professor, if you want to keep the good will of that fellow in your canoe, pick up your paddle and get busy. You've rested long enough."

Sighing, Somerville applied himself to the inevitable. The white warriors must share in the work.

Not only spears did the Indians carry, but also bows and arrows and stone-edged hatchets, or machetes. These were placed, when the savages were not paddling, in their loin-cloths. A formidable army they were, as bellicose in their expressions as in their equipment.

Until an hour before twilight the procession wound along with the creek; then Bajojo, sighting a large clearing, gave the order to camp for the night. Why the day's journey was ended so early, the Americans soon learned.

Hardly had the canoes been beached in a long row that resembled the legs of a centipede, when half the warriors vanished, with their bows and arrows, into the jungle. Bajojo, however, stayed with his white friends, doing his utmost to develop mute conversation. Those Indians who remained in camp busied themselves with the making of a score of fires. Along the

shore these small bundles of dried leaves and twigs rapidly burst into merry blazes.

To Professor Somerville the manner in which the fires were started without the aid of any form of flame was of absorbing interest. He departed from Hatcher and Craig, who were gesturing to the chief, to watch the savages' process.

Upon a piece of pith the pointed end of a long stick was placed; these tools the natives had brought with them, besides a stone in which a circular crevice had been carved. Upon the top of the stick the stone was fixed and held firmly by one Indian who, apparently, had no other task in the world. The hollowed circle fitted over the rod almost perfectly.

Another warrior produced from his canoe a long string of fibre which he wound around the vertical stick much as a boy winds a top. The winding completed, the Indian began, with amazing deftness and speed, to pull upon the string, with the result that the long stick whirled swiftly upon the pith; and the friction caused, in an astonishingly short time, a smoldering ember which blowing incensed to a small, dancing flame. Dry leaves caught the fire, and the Indians were ready to cook their supper.

"Remarkably ingenuous, these people!" commented Somerville as he rejoined the others.

"And sometimes," answered Hatcher, smiling at Bajojo, "remarkably treacherous. I don't like the avidity with which this chap has been looking at our rifles and other things. But don't let him guess we're suspicious of anything. We've got to be friends."

Craig groaned.

"You watch," he predicted dismally. "If the Huamus don't kill us, we'll be stabbed in the back by these friends."

Out of the jungle those warriors who had disappeared now began to return. Besides their bows and arrows, they brought armfuls of small game. Birds seemed to have been their usual prey, and they had displayed no favoritism in the selection of their future food. Two egrettes came with parakeets, parrots, and a heron which one marksman had killed down the creek. And there was a long, serpentine fish which had been speared.

"That's an electric eel," exclaimed Somerville, gaping at the thing. "I'd like to preserve it."

"To us right now," muttered Craig, "it's nothing but food. I'd like to eat it."

He did. It was found that the eel, when sliced and fried or roasted, furnished a most delectable, boneless fish-steak. To the white men Bajojo offered the choicest of the game, and they feasted heartily at the chief's fireside.

When the tribe threw itself down to sleep, long after darkness had fallen upon the wilderness, Hatcher whispered to his companions, "We can't be too trustful. We'll all lie down, but we'll take turns at staying awake. And keep the rifles within reach."

Throughout the black night the three men maintained a vigil, each for two hours. The fires had been smothered with leaves, and a heavy smoke floated over the encampment, defying the buzzing insects. Except the inexplicable noises in the jungle, nothing occurred that was alarming.

Early after dawn the line of canoes was once more winding up the creek, Bajojo leading, and the Americans immediately behind him. This day, Hatcher had warned, would probably bring them into the land of the Huamus.

He was right.

T NOON the voyagers came to an abrupt bend in the stream. Bajojo raised his arm; at a signal every canoe was driven to the bank, and the warriors leaped out into warm mud.

"What's happening now?" queried Craig, as he stepped into the slime.

Hatcher did not speak. He was watching the Indians. From some mysterious place in his craft, each brown man lifted a large nut similar to a walnut, but as big as a fist. He broke it upon a rock. He smeared its kernel over his body—with joyous, energetic movements that should have been accompanied by yells had not caution forbidden too much noise. Bajojo emulated the others.

"That's war paint," said Hatcher, frowning. "I've seen it used up along the Rio Santiago. The oil of that nut leaves stains on the body."

While he spoke Bajojo approached, extending a nut.

"Say, does he expect us to use the stuff?" cried Craig.

"We've got to, in order to preserve peace. We're warriors, aren't we?" Hatcher accepted the token of equality in the small army even while he argued with Lester Craig.

After reluctant hesitation, the Ameri-

cans finally stripped to the waist; over themselves they rubbed the kernel. Not a mark blemished their bodies; but no one else yet evinced the queer powers of the nut; and so they did not question Bajojo.

When the rite was ended, the party paddled on, and within two hours the results of the smearing were manifest. Upon every Indian huge, black splotches appeared. The white men, gazing at each other, were compelled to quell their disgust. They, too, were blackened, with only strips of white skin visible to denote their race. A hideous crowd, those marauders, a terrible crowd. If they had appeared docile and handsome before, they now seemed devilish and barbaric. In such a party did the three Americans find themselves; and they were not observers; they were participants.

Within a few minutes after the white features had become black Bajojo commanded another stop. Once more the line of canoes moved upon the shore, but all the warriors remained seated in the crafts. The chief summoned two followers and whispered to them; nodding, the two paddled swiftly upstream, and disappeared around a bend.

No one spoke. The hundred men sat as silent as the jungle Once, when Hatcher bent to say that they must be near the Huamus, Bajojo waved his arms frantically and scowled a demand for quiet. He was obeyed.

In half an hour the two Indians who had paddled away came back to their fellows; they came trembling with excitement, their eyes blazing. In low tones they imparted their message to Bajojo, who whispered to his white recruits, "Huamus!"

In scarcely audible murmurs Hatcher interpreted the message. "Those two spies have found the Huamu settlement. We are about to attack."

Professor Somerville raised his thin face; upon it lay haggard lines.

"Pray that we find Dwight Lenover alive," he said.

There was, however, little time for prayer or even hoping. From Bajojo had come an order which impelled the tribe to activity, activity which astounded the whites by its efficient speed and noiselessness.

All the Juamatus sprang out of their canoes and stood waist-deep in the water. Upon the shores they threw their bows and arrows, spears, machetes. Then they stooped and lifted handfuls of mud from the creek bottom. Into the canoes went the slime, quickly, silently. In twenty minutes every craft had sunk to the bottom and was firmly weighted down with mud.

This accomplished, the savages scampered into the jungle growth, followed by their white brothers. Had any foreign eye wandered over the creek, it would have seen nothing abnormal. Only calm water and jungle pressing down upon it; signs of human presence had been completely obliterated.

Through the dense growth the line of marauders slipped without sound. The leading Juamatus hacked a path with their machetes. But every stroke was a swift incision which created hardly a sound, and falling branches were caught and deposited quietly.

The progress of the Juamatus was phantomlike. In such a slinking, canny manner does the jaguar advance upon his prey. Only the Americans were awkward. Upon them the exasperated Bajojo cast many an appealing look, beseeching them to be careful in their steps. They tried to respond, but with little success. Twigs insisted on snapping under their feet.

For a mile the naked, blackened army, hideous to behold, crept through the jungle. It climbed a hill, upon the crest of which Bajojo raised his arms. Immediately every man fell to his stomach. Hatcher, Somerville, and Craig also lay prostrate, the brambles scratching their faces.

Prone, the attackers advanced, moving like alligators and dragging their weapons. Suddenly Bajojo stopped. Everyone stopped. Before them the hill sloped down to a clear, fertile valley. They gazed along the incline. To the features of the whites rushed pallor—and awe, for they were peering upon the home of the savage Huamus.

There it was, fifty yards below them; a village of crude huts made of thatch and palm-leaves. Some of those dwellings were nothing more than roofs on four stilts, canopies to drop shade upon the inhabitants. It huddled close to the creek, that settlement, and drowsy life filled it.

Brown-skinned, naked warriors, not unlike the Juamatus, wandered aimlessly from hut to hut. They were unarmed, unsuspicious of hostile presence. Some of them sprawled in the huts, staring upward and dreaming. Near the creek a few worked in patches of cultivated soil which, ostensibly, formed the tribe's vegetable garden.

There were women, too, fat, slovenly, flabby, ugly women, dully unmindful of

their nudity, and working like the men. A horde of children lounged about the village, some of them playing, others sleeping.

Between Somerville and Craig lay Owen Hatcher. He was scanning the valley narrowly; of a sudden his hand gripped the professor's shoulder.

"Look! Look at that large hut in the center—look at the man in front of it," he whispered into the professor's ear.

Somerville stared, as did Craig, to whom the words had been repeated.

An apparently old man squatted on the ground, beating a rock upon a mound of white things resembling corn or beans. Rhythmically he toiled, mechanically, while his head rose and fell with every stroke of the rock.

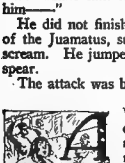
He was not entirely naked. About him hung a few dirty rags. Even from the hill-top, he appeared to be bony and emaciated, a man rapidly sinking toward the end; but the amazing thing about him, the thing which checked the Americans' breaths, the thing which fascinated their eyes, was his skin. Under the bronze tint painted by the sun, that skin was white.

"Lenover," faltered Professor Somerville. "It's Dwight Lenover!"

"Listen, when we attack, we three will rush directly to him," Hatcher whispered hastily. "We've got to save him, even from our own, understand? I hardly think these fellows will harm him, but we've got to make certain of it. Go to him. Make him know he's safe. Make him——"

He did not finish. From Bajojo, chief of the Juamatus, suddenly tore a piercing scream. He jumped to his feet, waved his spear.

The attack was begun.



WILDER, more ferocious, more beastly carnage the whites had never witnessed or imagined. Every blackened Juamatu sprang up from his concealment. Into the jungle silence rose a medley of raucous, fanatic war yells that split the ears with their savage fury. The black devils swarmed down the hill, spears and machetes waving above them. The bows and arrows had been left on the slope's top. Such weapons were not to be used at close quarters.

Down in the valley the Huamus were shocked to life. They rushed out of the huts, gaped for a second at the oncoming savages, and turned for their weapons of defense. But it was too late. The Juamatus were upon them.

Frenzy and lust for blood seized the attackers. Before their fury all Huamus fell—warriors, women, children. Spearheads plunged viciously into human flesh, only to be withdrawn for another wild thrust. Machetes hacked fiendishly, smashing death with every stroke.

And through it all those deafening war screams incessantly ripped, growing jubilant as triumph followed triumph, as murder followed murder. Bajojo was most active of all; his spear and machete worked fiercely, simultaneously; before his strength a dozen victims dropped, screeching, to their deaths.

The Huamus did not pause to fight. Caught in slumber, they could only try to dash away from their enemies. So it was that most of them escaped with their lives, for they succeeded in rushing into the concealing density of the jungle. But, for all that, a hundred lifeless, mangled bodies were scattered about the valley that had, a few moments before, slept in peace.

In the battle the Americans played a curious part. With the first charge they had gone directly to the wizened white man who sat thumping his rock upon the strange mound. He had seen their approach. In terror, he had scampered away toward the jungle, uttering fearful cries in a cracked voice. Arms extended, he had struggled to outdistance what seemed instant death.

But when Hatcher, moving his long legs with dazzling speed, had overtaken him at once. He grasped the man's arm, whirled him around.

"Lenover!" he yelled.

Abruptly the old man halted, stared. He blinked at the three blackened men who gathered around him. He stared, dazed.

Professor Somerville shook him.

"Lenover! Dwight Lenover! Stand up, man, we've come to get you. We're whites—we're whites."

Dwight Lenover, bearded and ragged and filthy, gazed at his rescuers.

"Wh-white—men—" he repeated, his lips trembing strangely.

There were wonder and incredulity and hysteria in his tones. He saw the strips of white skin on the painted faces of the white warriors. His hand rose to touch Hatcher's features—to fondle them, as though he were trying to assure himself that this was not a mirage.

"We found your canteen." Craig actually shouted.

"Canteen—white men—" Lenover swayed dizzily.

Of a sudden a great smile burst upon his worn countenance. The eyes shone. He raised his hands toward the sky, and a quivering call broke from him.

"Great God—white men!"

Then he collapsed before his rescuers and lay unconscious, breathing heavily.

Around him the Americans stood, rifles raised in protection. They did not join the destruction; they only watched, stunned by the bloody savagery of it all, dumbstruck by the sight of a hundred gory corpses strewn about them, nauseated by the rollicking screams of the dancing conquerors, war yells that had changed to triumphant howls while the Juamatus danced wildly over the scene of their victory.

The murder was ended. In less than five minutes the Huamus had been defeated and their ranks slaughtered as a sign of Juamatu supremacy.

It was over, but if the massacre had been gruesome, its aftermath was abhorrent. The white men gathered about the unconscious form of Dwight Lenover were repulsed by what they saw; yet they looked on, their stares held by the horrible sight.

The conquerors were taking the trophies of their victory. From corpse to corpse they darted, hacking off heads with their machetes. Children's heads fell easily, for the necks were thin; but adult heads, the heads of warriors, had to be chopped.

Bajojo detailed a group of his paint-stained adherents to throw the decapitated bodies into the creek. This was done with the utmost relish and shouts of glee, while the heads were brought to the center of the village, in preparation for the customary rites.

Lenover regained consciousness when the dreadful decapitation had ended. He sat on the ground, dizzily swaying, struggling mightily to believe the glorious truth of his rescue. He gaped at the three men about him and listened to their names; he touched them, laughed hoarsely, staggered to his feet, and hugged each American with all his feeble strength.

"My canteen," he chanted. "My canteen! Oh, God, I'd forgotten it. How long have I been here? Years—years?"

"Two years," gently said Hatcher, his heart thumping and aching with pity for this wreck of what had been a decent man. Lenover seemed nothing more than ragclad bones; his face was covered with a dirty gray beard, and his hair hung down over his neck. Only his eyes still burned with all the vivacity of a civilized man.

"I didn't know you were whites," he prattled. "You're smeared like the others. I ran. I always run when they come."

"They come often?" asked Craig, startled.

"Yes. They've been here three times, and always they slaughter. Later these Huamus, what's left of them, go back and pay the debt. It's always war, war—oh, how I've lived through it, I don't know."

Lenover was clinging to Hatcher. One might have thought that he was endeavoring to splutter all his terrible experiences in one breathless speech, as if the thing were choking him and he wished to cough it out.

"I was a slave. They kept me because I worked well. I never expected to see a white man again. I used to pray. Oh, a man begins to look to God out here, and I talked to Him for hours every night. That made me remember my language. And He heard, because He sent you."

Rapidly Hatcher explained their coming.

"Now we're going back with the Juamatus; we'll go on to Arima," he said.

"We've got to wait twelve days," cried Lenover, in desperation.

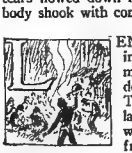
"Why?"

"You'll see. The Juamatus always stay twelve days, for their celebration, while the Huamus wander in the jungle. We must wait."

"Say—" began Craig, protesting.

"But I don't care," cried Dwight Lenover, laughing hysterically. "I don't care! I'm safe—I'm safe! God—white men!"

And, beating his fists against Hatcher's chest, he continued to laugh wildly while tears flowed down into his beard and his body shook with convulsive sobs.



LENOVER was correct in saying that the marauders would not depart for twelve days. They settled in the village, ready to enjoy with fanatic fervor the fruits of their conquest.

Because they were warriors, part of Bajojo's army, the white men were compelled to accept the delay in home-going; and they submitted to the inevitable. They assumed ownership of a hut on the outskirts of the village, apart from the savages, and watched the proceedings.

The rites were as weird as they were revolting.

In clay pots which the Huamus had left in their flight, water from the creek was heated. Over roaring fires, which served only to augment the terrific heat in the clearing, the water was brought to the boiling point. Now it was that the aged men of the expedition were called as masters of ceremonies; the young boys, too, came to dance around the fires.

With the machetes' aid, the hundred heads were emptied of bones and muscles, so that merely an outer layer of skin and a thin stratum of flesh remained on each—sufficient to preserve the general features of the victim. Into the pots the trophies were dropped, and there they floated, in boiling water.

While the aged medicine men and priests shouted over the simmering heads, others continually stirred the water. Hatcher and his companions moved among the savages, impelled by a driving curiosity which sent them to witness the celebration. Upon the top of each pot they saw grease gather, boiled from the flesh.

Sometimes the whites were obliged to join in the demonstration. They danced, leaped, shot their rifles into the air; and Bajojo, viewing their co-operation, was gratified. Continuously he grinned approbation.

"We've got to keep their friendship," warned Hatcher. "When these fellows become drunk with victory, they're apt to forget that we're not enemies."

"I knew there'd be danger," moaned the pessimistic Craig, but he showed no fear, and watched the rites.

For two full days the heads were in boiling water; constantly the pots were refilled. And on the second day the priests began to heat sand, loam, and mud on flat slabs of rock which were propped over the fires.

Just before twilight the heads were taken from their greasy water. They had shrunk until they were no larger than oranges.

Of all the whites, Professor Somerville was most deeply interested in the fantastic process. Hour after hour he stood among the Juamatus by the flames, and gaped, entranced. He saw the savages take the heads, after they had cooled, and force small sticks, like rivets, through the lips. These were twisted until no aperture remained at the mouth. Then, into the holes that had once been necks, sand was spilled as one pours it into a bag. Another plug closed the necks, and the heads, filled with hot sand, were swung by the hair, like slings, around and around.

Every hour the cooled sand was discarded for a fresh, hot replacement, and the whirling continued. Four days passed—days in which the whites sat gaping at the ritual, nights in which they slept two at a time, while the others maintained an alert, nervous vigil.

At the end of four days the heads were finished. Each retained the features of its former possessor, though that resemblance was but a weird miniature. From the loin cloths of the conquerors the trophies dangled. The Juamatus were now ready to direct their attention to another method of celebration.

Out of the Huamu huts they brought pots filled with a beverage which Owen Hatcher identified as *giamanchi*, an intoxicating, stupefying drink obtained from herbs upon which the women of the tribe had chewed. This they began to guzzle in amazing quantities.

Bajojo was a shrewd chieftain. Fearing that his men might be attacked by the dispersed Huamus, he permitted no more than half his followers to become intoxicated at any one time; for eight days the privileges of revelry alternated among the warriors, though Bajojo himself was almost constantly drunk.

Often he offered *giamanchi* to the whites, but it was steadfastly refused; courteously, in truth, yet vigorously. Hatcher and his friends could not risk intoxication.

As the days dragged by, Dwight Lenover recuperated with surprising vitality. Among his own kind again, he became one of them, sharing their watches at night, and their conversations during the days. He had gleaned much information concerning the savages, and he enthralled Professor Somerville with his accounts for endless hours.

ON THE morning of the twelfth day Bajojo, crazily intoxicated with his triumph as much as with *giamanchi*, swaggered into the white men's hut. He stood unsteadily, his eyes bloodshot. All the war paint had vanished from the smeared bodies by this time, so that Bajojo swayed in his natural, naked glory. He pointed to the rifles and to the

other things which Hatcher had brought up from the submerged canoes: shaving sets, food, and ammunition. Until now none of the canned goods had been touched, for the Juamatu hunters had brought plenty of game from the jungle. Hatcher was conserving his stores, however, for the journey to Arima; they would be extremely necessary.

Bajojo thumped his hand against his chest and pointed again to the Americans' equipment.

"What does he want, anyway?" Craig, standing behind Hatcher, queried anxiously.

"He wants our things," hastily answered Hatcher, frowning. "I told you I noticed the avidity in his eyes. He's always wanted them. Now he's drunk and he wants them more than ever. We'll have to be careful."

"We can't surrender the equipment!" expostulated Somerville, with indignation. "How will we return to civilization?"

"Careful how you refuse," Lenover added in low tones. "We can't afford to make an enemy of the man. Careful!"

Hatcher advanced, smiling. He pointed to his possessions and shook his head. Only the shaving mirror he lifted and presented to Bajojo.

The chief appeared dazed. He accepted the mirror, turned it in his hand uncertainly, and looked at the rifles which the men held. A moment of hesitation calmed him. Then he did a surprising thing.

With all his strength he hurled the mirror to the ground, so that it shattered to pieces. Again he pointed to the rifles and to himself.

Hatcher bit his lip, scowled. In determination he shook his head. To relinquish the rifles would be calamitous. What, afterward, could serve to keep these Juamatu "friends" at bay?

Seeing the white man's refusal, Bajojo drunkenly emitted a harsh cry. He raised his fist, thundered something, and strode out of the hut.

Immediately Lester Craig gripped Hatcher's arm.

"I think we're in for it now. You've angered him. We'd better run—" the plump explorer cried in tremulous anxiety.

Out upon the valley where the savages were still in revelry, Hatcher glowered. Legs astride, rifle over his arm, he considered.

"If we run, they'll surely chase us. That will make them avowed enemies," was his opinion. "And—the white man's mission is to leave friends."

Dwight Lenover, trembling, but not as haggard as he had appeared twelve days earlier, advanced in his rags. He brushed back his shaggy beard and faced Hatcher.

"I think," he said, "we ought to forget the white man's mission, and think only of ourselves."

With startling fury Hatcher turned upon him.

"See here, Lenover," he snapped, "when you're in the wilderness you never forget the white man's mission in favor of yourself. If Somerville and Craig and I hadn't stuck to that principle, you'd still be a Huamu slave. We must think of preserving friendship for the sake of the whites who will come here in later years, for the sake of pioneers, settlers, squatters, we must leave friends. And running away makes enemies."

"This is a poor time for idealism, Hatcher," Lester Craig ventured, as Lenover, awed by the tirade, retired. "When those Indians are getting ready to add white heads to their trophies. I agree with Lenover. Let's run for the canoes. We can hold them back with our rifles. They're afraid of the things."

"No! We'll wait and see."

"We'll wait and die."

"We——"

Hatcher stopped. In that instant he knew that all his hopes for leaving friends in the wilderness were futile. What he saw convinced him of the fact.

Bajojo had summoned his warriors about him, all those that were not lying around in a *giamanchi* stupor, and he was directing them toward the white men's hut. The savages responded with yells. They rushed for their spears. A moment later they were grouped in a mass ready to charge.

Hatcher snapped erect. His eyes blazed. The white heat of the tropics had brought perspiration to his face; he drew on his helmet and stepped out of the shelter.

"All right. There's no help for it," he said to his companions. "We'll have to fight and run. Craig, you stand beside me and lift your gun. We'll walk backward to the river. There are two canoes there; get in, grab a paddle, and start downstream. Professor, you do the same. Two men in each canoe. Ready!"

He called to Bajojo, who looked at him in a daze. Then he pointed to his rifle

and to the naked warriors, intimating that they were not to advance on sufferance of death. When Bajojo comprehended, he emitted an enraged scream; roared a command. But his sober followers hesitated. They had seen the power of the lead-spitting weapon. They were not willing to sacrifice themselves for an intoxicated, irresponsible man. Had Bajojo been himself, matters might have been different, but under the circumstances, the Juamatus, inherently cowards, hesitated.

That Bajojo should turn upon his friends was not amazing to them; treachery is a form of shrewdness to the savage. But that he should turn upon them in broad daylight, when they were able to defend themselves with the guns—that was another thing.

Meanwhile, the four Americans retreated to the canoes on the banks of the creek. Into them they stepped. Craig began paddling one craft, while Dwight Lenover leaned over the stern with a rifle. Somerville propelled the other, and Hatcher maintained a watch.

Thus, unexpectedly, the explorers severed their relations with their recent allies. Their task accomplished, they were prepared for the trip to Arima. But into Hatcher's voice flowed a note of sadness. Staring back at the banks upon which the yelling Bajojo's silent men stood gaping, he muttered, "We're leaving enemies. No white man will ever be safe in Juamatu territory. We have failed."

DOWN the creek the two canoes glided, aided by the sluggish current. Lenover and Hatcher never ceased pointing their rifles backward, even after they had rounded a bend and had slipped out of the savages' view.

"We aren't safe ourselves," Hatcher went on. "Far from it. They'll follow. Their twelve days of celebration are ended. They'll follow, I'm sure. They paddle faster than we do. Always they'll be a short distance behind us, until the first night we are forced to stop for rest. Then, out of the blackness, arrows will fly."

Lester Craig, paddling lustily, groaned.

"We have failed," mumbled Hatcher in queer despondency. "Though we succeeded in finding you, Lenover, we have failed. We are leaving enemies. Enemies for posterity. We——"

Abruptly he stopped, silenced by a choked shout from Professor Somerville. Hatcher turned; he saw the professor motioning down the shaded creek, and squinted in that direction.

In that second all his melancholy suddenly burst into a shower of wild joy. He rose in the canoe, incredulous ecstacy in his eyes.

Before he could speak, Lester Craig had yelled as he waved his arms, "Look! They've come! The Brazilian troops! The *caboclos* delivered our message! Look, Hatcher, look!"

His advice to look was superfluous. Like the others, Hatcher was glaring greedily, as if he yearned mightily to embrace what he viewed. Up the creek came a double line of canoes; and in each canoe two uniformed men paddled. Brilliant, red-and-blue uniforms. The glittering barrels of rifles. Cheery calls, familiar shouts of greeting and courage. Brass buttons dazzlingly reflecting occasional beams of sunlight. That line of color brought warmth into him as it brought civilization's gaiety into the wilderness.

"We have not failed!" he cried hoarsely, jubilantly. "We have not failed, I tell you! The soldiers have come. We don't need our equipment any longer. I'm going back and present it to Bajojo—food, rifles, whatever he wants—except ammunition. We'll leave friends! Friends for future whites who come here."

The other three Americans unexpectedly, impulsively, joined him in a cheer resounding through the jungle's hot silence; and after it they laughed in helpless, unreasonable hilarity as they saw the glamorous line of Brazilian military canoes glide up the creek.

FISH POISON

VARIOUS Indian tribes caught fish in quantities by narcotizing them in small streams or pools. The method employed was to cast into the water such plant products as walnut bark, tephrosia root, yucca (soap-weed) root, buckeyes, etc., depending on the part of the country. These products were usually crushed before one or the other was put into the water, and although the fish were soon stupefied and easily gathered in baskets, their food value was not impaired.—F. W. H.

Author of "The Romance of Transportation," "Early Western Rambles," etc.

Trade drove them onward—first the pack trains, then the great trains of covered wagons—threading their way over the old Santa Fé Trail, creating in the dust of their passing the ties which were to bind the great Southwest to the United States

IN THE YEAR 1790 there came to Kaskaskia, Illinois, from Pennsylvania, a merchant by the name of William Morrison. Establishing himself there he prospered, and in due time looked around for more worlds to conquer. Somewhere to the southwest of Kaskaskia lay the Spanish settlements of New Mexico; and in that direction did Morrison turn his eyes. In the spring of 1804 he selected a creole by the name of Baptiste Lelande as a worthy person for the great adventure, fitted him with a small stock of goods, and sent him off to find Santa Fé and to test its winds of trade.

What dangerous undertakings were casually attempted in those early days, what sublime egotism and self-dependence actuated its men! Santa Fé was over a thousand miles away from St. Louis, with unknown rivers, prairies, mountains, and tribes of roaming savages between; yet Morrison gives to Lelande a stock of goods and bids him sell them in New Mexico! Lelande accepts the goods and the instructions and hies himself to the Missouri River and the wide and shallow Platte. Perhaps he knew that the Mallett brothers had followed the Platte nearly seventy years before and had reached the destination he had set for himself; perhaps he also knew that forty years before his own venture a party of French traders had gone down the Mississippi and up the Arkansas to the mountains, and had come in touch and conflict with the Spanish merchants; but whether he knew these things or not, he struck the Platte, followed it and its South Fork, reached the mountains at the edge of the Spanish settlements, sent some Indians in to find out what kind of a welcome he might expect, and soon thereafter entered the town.

Prices were good and the demand brisk, and he sold his wares at a good profit; but one can almost see him pause when he thought of that long and dangerous journey back to Illinois. To say the man was a thief is to go too far; doubtless he had had experiences on his long westward journey that had put fear in his heart; and to return might be to face even worse than he had passed through. He, therefore, did not return; he remained in Santa Fé, and found himself new friends and a way to make a living.

There he was found by Dr. Robinson, three years later dispatched by Lieut. Pike on the ostensible purpose of ferreting out the absconder and recovering Morrison's money. Pike endeavored to have the creole returned to St. Louis; but since he, himself, was under arrest for invading Spanish territory with part of the United States army, he was in no position to press his purpose.

Now we come to the year 1809 and the month of November, when three men left the Missouri settlements bound for the Spanish towns. They were never again heard from, which is not strange, seeing that they attempted to cross the prairies in the winter, strange to the land and its rigors.

About eight years later in 1812 James Baird, Robert McKnight, John Scott, a man by the name of Chambers, and several

companions became enthused by Lieut. Pike's accounts of the commercial opportunities in New Mexico. The threat of Spanish jails found them optimistic, for the latest news had it that a revolution had overthrown the old régime. In this they erred, for the revolution misfired and the old conditions had grown worse. They left Missouri in high hopes and with a modest supply of goods, reached New Mexico, saw their goods confiscated, and themselves thrown into jail in Chihuahua, where they remained for nine years.

IN 1815 Auguste P. Chouteau and Julius De Munn joined another trader and left St. Louis for the upper waters of the Arkansas River, the boundary line between the two countries. On the way they bought out the trader and took over the contracts with his men; but when they reached his camp they found that both goods and men had moved westward into the settlements. After them went De Munn, and he found them at Taos, went on down to Santa Fé, found a friendly welcome, and then took men and goods back to Chouteau on the Arkansas. The next spring De Munn went again to the Mexican settlements, was discourteously treated, and with blare of trumpet and the clank of sword, was escorted back to his party by two hundred Spanish troops. After looking over the little party of traders, the Mexicans told them they might remain in the country if they selected the north side of the Arkansas River, which was United States soil.

Chouteau and De Munn wandered about for a time between the Arkansas and the upper waters of the South Platte until finally a troop of Spanish horse swept down upon them and provided an escort to Santa Fé, not forgetting to take with them everything of value the camp contained. Reaching Santa Fé, they were thrown into jail for two days, tried, sentenced to get out of Spanish territory, and helped on their way. Did the Spanish conscience, tempered as it was, hurt a little?

In 1819 another American, by name of Merriwether, who later was to become Governor of the Territory of New Mexico under the American flag, accompanied a force of Indians to the Spanish line, was captured and also imprisoned.

Now came the Mexican revolution and freedom from Spanish dominion, and the news stirred venturesome individuals in far away Missouri. The unfortunate Baird-McKnight-Chambers party, now released from the Chihuahua prison, moved northward to return to the United States; and, reaching Santa Fé, met and joined a party of traders and trappers under Col. Glenn and Jacob Fowler. Fowler and Glenn had left the latter's trading post on the Verdigris River in what is now Oklahoma, and followed the Arkansas westward toward the mountains, reached Taos, was well received, trapped and traded, took Baird and McKnight into their ranks and went back along the Arkansas and northeasterly across Kansas to the Missouri settlements.

Up in Missouri was a man named William Becknell, who has been given the honorable title of Father of the Santa Fé Trail; perhaps he deserves it, although his first venture over it had no thought of reaching Santa Fé, but was frankly concerned with trading with the Comanches along the upper Arkansas. They fell in with a party of Mexican troops, who persuaded them to go to Santa Fé, where they could make larger profits. This they did, and obtained profits which fanned the fires of hope. Leaving his companions in Santa Fé, Becknell returned to the Missouri that same winter, which was no mean venture, and reached his destination in January, 1822.

NOW comes the year of the birth of the real Santa Fé trail. In 1822 there was organized an expedition frankly for the purpose of trading direct with the Mexican settlements, and its instigator had as much claim to the founding of the Santa Fé Trail as has Becknell. This man was Col. Benjamin Cooper, and with him were his two nephews, Braxton and Stephen Cooper. Leaving the Missouri settlements in April, 1822, with a dozen companions, and with four thousand or five thousand dollars' worth of merchandise, they reached Taos safely, disposed of their goods profitably, and went back to Missouri the same year.

In this year, 1822 was another expedition, under Becknell, which did not have easy going. He left the vicinity of Franklin, Missouri, a month later than Cooper, with twenty-one men and three wagons, chose an unfortunate course and wandered

about over the deserts south of the Arkansas until the party escaped death only by the slimmest chance.

There are two phases connected with the trail that he may be unqualifiedly credited with: he took out the first wagons that ever attempted the trip, and he led the first party of traders across the Cimarron, or Dry Route. He also is entitled to the credit for leading the first party of traders to Santa Fé, for the others sought Taos first and used the mountain division of the trail which led past the site of Bent's Fort. But the Santa Fé Trail did not entirely consist of the Dry Route, and Col. Cooper had preceded Becknell as far as the Caches on the Arkansas River. To Becknell, also, belongs the honor of being the first man to take any kind of arrangement on wheels across the plains to the mountains.

A third expedition left Missouri in the fall of that same year under Baird and Chambers. There were fifty men with them, but when they reached the Arkansas River they were forced by a snow storm to go into winter quarters. During the winter they lost their animals, had to cache their goods and go on in the following spring to Taos. Here they obtained mules and returned to their caches for the recovery of their goods. This cache site was on the north side of the river, and was named the Caches from this incident, and the hollows formed by the pits remained visible for many years, being a famous landmark.

1823 saw Col. Cooper again on the trail, but it is in 1824 that we find an epoch-marker in the history of the trail. In that year Le Grande, Storrs and Marmaduke organized the first great trading caravan and the first one in which wagons were to share honors equally with pack animals. It was composed of eighty men, one hundred and twenty-five horses and mules, and twenty-five wagons; and the value of its merchandise was around thirty thousand dollars. It took this party two months and three days to make the trip to Santa Fé and it went over the Dry Route between the Arkansas and Cimarron Rivers. For the thirty thousand dollars' worth of goods they took out, they returned with specie and furs to the value of one hundred and ninety thousand dollars.

It can now be said that the Santa Fé trade was established, for with the independence of Mexico the trade was encouraged for more than two decades and was destined to reach imposing totals.

Pack animals made the trip for the last time in 1825. In 1829 the first escort of U. S. dragoons went with a caravan, leaving it at the Arkansas to shift for itself over the most dangerous part of the journey. In 1830 oxen were first used on the trail as draft animals. In 1840 was the Chihuahua expedition, which was under Mexican merchants and left Van Burén, Arkansas, crossed upper Texas to the Rio Grande and reached Chihuahua successfully. 1841 was the year of the first Texan expedition, and in 1843 Texas, learning that a very valuable caravan would leave for Santa Fé that year, sent Col. Snively with an armed force to intercept it after it crossed the Arkansas and started over the Dry Route, which Texas claimed as her own territory.

Snively went north and recruited some Americans at Fort Lancaster (Fort Lupton) to swell his forces. The Mexicans sent an armed force of five or six hundred men to protect the caravan after it left the U. S. dragoons. The Texans soundly whipped the advance party of this force, which frightened Armijo and sent him in a panic back to the settlements. Meanwhile the caravan had reached the ford and hesitated to leave the protection of Col. Cooke and his two hundred troops. Cooke acted on his own initiative, crossed the river and captured the division of Texans camped there, taking their arms, and turning them loose to go home, leaving them ten muskets for defense and for procuring game.

This Texan threat and suspicions against the United States threatened to put an end to the trade, for Mexico closed the customs houses to American traders.

The trail had become a permanent and valuable road long before this, and the trade had steadily shifted into the hands of fewer and richer traders. In 1824 Congress was petitioned to erect a fort on the Arkansas, mark out the best road, and appoint agents at Santa Fé and Chihuahua to see that the customs duties were levied according to law. In 1825 a bill was passed which authorized the expenditure of thirty thousand dollars to survey and lay out the road and to make treaties with the Indians for the safe passage of the caravans.

The road was surveyed and marked with mounds; and with the independence of true pioneers the traders preferred the old route and ignored the new. In 1834, however, there ceased to be any need for markers, the extreme wetness of the season so soft-

ening the prairie soil that the string of heavy wagons ground their tires in so deeply that the road could not be missed thereafter. To this day in western Kansas, and doubtless in other sections of the trail, the ruts endure and are plain to be seen.

During the governorship of Manuel Armijo the customs became excessive. Not satisfied with the receipts, he arbitrarily levied an impost of five hundred dollars on each wagon; and now began the period of great vehicles, built especially for the trade. To his chagrin he saw the number of wagons shrink while their size increased.

Professional freighters were entering the trade, hauling goods from Missouri to Santa Fé at ten to twelve cents per pound; and on to Chihuahua for another six to eight cents. Usually the profits of the traders fluctuated between twenty per cent. and forty per cent., sometimes reaching fifty per cent.; occasionally they fell to ten per cent., and once or twice money was lost. The profits at last began to decrease, and it might prove to be an interesting speculation to wonder if the trade would not have shrunk and finally died from this cause if it had not been abruptly changed by the Mexican War.

In 1843 there came the first set and authoritative opposition to the overland commerce, as much to the disgust of the Mexicans as to the Americans, since by now there were numbers of Mexican merchants engaged in the trade: Governor Armijo posted the ban closing the ports to the transprairie traffic in August, 1843; but there was a change of heart in Mexico City and he opened them again the following year. The years 1844, 1845 and 1846 saw increases in the commerce.

Having now reached the beginning of the Mexican War we come to the end of the *old* Santa Fé Trail. It ceased to be an international road carrying foreign commerce between Missouri and New Mexico, and had become so well established and used so continuously by trader, soldier and, later, stagecoach driver, that it belongs to another epoch. Before we leave it, however, let us look at the trail itself.

IN THE beginning its Missouri terminal was Franklin, and its western end was Taos, New Mexico. Franklin held its position until the Missouri River went on an especially vicious rampage and wiped out the town. Independence then came to the fore in the East and Santa Fé in the West. The former held its place in the sun for years, until the Missouri again took a hand in the destiny of things and cut away the fine Independence landing. Westport, farther up the stream, now having a better boat landing than Independence, moved out in front and began that rapid growth which was to end in Kansas City.

Taking the trail during the high days of Independence, we will trace it westward, our basic data being Gregg's itinerary.

From Independence it ran westward to Round Grove (Lone Elm Tree), thirty-five miles, which was both camp spot and minor rendezvous for straggling wagons coming in from other points. Here was a lone elm, a famous landmark in the trail's early days, standing by a pool of water. Some of the earlier parties organized here, but in later days this was done farther on. Round Grove was between the present Olathe and Gardner, Kansas. Next came the Junction, where the trail to the Platte River and to Oregon turned off. In later days it had a signpost bearing the words: "Road to Oregon." It was about half a dozen miles from Round Grove.

Then came Black Jack Point, four miles beyond the Junction, followed by the Narrows, a narrow ridge between the waters of the Kansas on the north and the Osage on the south. It lay sixty-five miles from Independence and was one of the most cordially hated parts of the entire route. In wet weather the road was a quagmire and the wagons often sunk to the running gear in the soft ooze. To become stuck beyond the ability of the team to pull one out was a common occurrence with traders, and other teams were hitched on while the men worked with shoulders and levers, often above their waists in the cold ooze. While they floundered along the Narrows they might camp at Willow Springs, ten and a half miles from the crossing of the Black Jack, and west of present Baldwin City. This also was known as Wakarusa Point.

110 Mile Creek was the next point, so named because it was that distance from old Fort Osage, while only one hundred miles from Independence. The present Scranton is not far from this crossing. Bridge Creek came eight miles farther, and then Switzler's Creek, one hundred and six teen miles out, with good water. Rock Creek was passed and Big John Spring reached, springing from near the base of a big oak, and with a stream cool, pure and

copious. Except in case of accident no wagons remained here, for only two miles farther was the most famous of all eastern camp spots: Council Grove, one hundred and forty-five miles from Independence.

Here was the stepping off place, and here was the last chance to cut hardwoods for spare axles and other wagon parts. Up to now the wagons had straggled more or less as separate units, but from here on they would go as a solid train. Great electioneering took place for the choice of captain, everything was put in good shape, the animals allowed to graze and rest until the signal came to get under way. The grove lay on both sides of Council Grove Creek, in a little valley.

Fifteen miles beyond Council Grove was Diamond Spring, said by Emory to have been three or four feet across, with a temperature of fifty-four degrees. On the prairies in summer this is a temperature which should quite properly evoke enthusiasm.

It was followed, fifteen miles farther on, by Lost Spring, on the creek which joins the Cottonwood at Marion, Kansas, and is perpetuated in name by a railroad junction. Cottonwood Creek crossing lay twelve miles past it, and here camp was pitched in a bend which had the creek on all sides but one, and where guns were freshly primed in hope of catching sight of the first buffalo, which would be old bulls far from the main herds and much too tough to eat.

Turkey Creek, twenty-five miles farther, came next and sometimes revealed the first herd of buffalo, and also Indians, the latter athirst for the caravan's horses and mules. Buffalo wallows were common sights here, and the prairie rattlesnake could be counted on as a nuisance. Seventeen miles farther was the crossing of the Little Arkansas, five or six paces wide, with a slow current, steep banks that had to be cut, and with a justly hated and miry bottom which had to be bridged with earth, brush, and grass. This stream was not only a much liked point of ambush for Indians in later years, but it had the trick of rising a dozen feet in half as many hours. The crossing was not far from the present village of Little River.

Twenty miles past the Little Arkansas came Cow Creek, another mire, and with more certain promise of Indian callers in the evening or at dawn. It lay in a deep bed with steep walls and was heavily masked by trees. Here it was that in 1844 Chavez and his cafavan were plundered by some white renegades, and Chavez murdered. After leaving this creek the Plumb Buttes came into sight, and lizards and land turtles moved out of the ruts. Despite the accursed mire and the steep banks, the creek was quickly forgotten in the excitement caused by the nearness of the Arkansas River, which was reached by the trail only sixteen miles farther on.

THE first sight of the shining sand hills of the Arkansas usually sent the tenderfeet in a mad race to reach its banks. The scene was magnificent, for on the right the green prairie stretched away in great swells covered with vast herds of buffalo; ahead and to the left were the sand hills, seventy-five to one hundred feet high, golden in the afternoon sun, and set off by the wide, hurrying river and its sparse cottonwood fringe and numerous green islands.

This was before the days of irrigation, before Colorado diverted about all the water of the Arkansas and ruffled Kansan spirits. Then it was from two to five feet deep, swift, and a quarter of a mile wide; now it is a series of puny trickles hurrying along small tracks in its wide and damp bed, the total of the trickles not wide enough to be called a creek; but a prolonged or heavy rain sends it up like magic. Like the South Platte, the Arkansas is hardly more than a memory so far as water is concerned, except during freshets, of course.

The Arkansas having been reached, the trail followed up its north bank and came to Walnut Creek, twenty-six miles beyond Cow Creek. This stream was about ten or twelve paces wide, running well down in its narrow valley and having near its mouth a large spring, where Fort Zarah was later built. Its bottom was covered with tall grass, excellent cover for lurking Indians. In the later days of the trail Walnut Creek was one of the most dangerous places on the Kansas prairies.

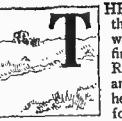
From Cow Creek westward the Indian country lay on both sides of the road. Here the prairie swells became higher, sharper and closer together, concentrating rainfall; and here were to be seen shallow pools, mud holes in the rainy season and white patches of sun-curled mud in the dry.

Sixteen miles beyond Walnut Creek, Pawnee Rock reared its massive head above the prairie, rising to an abrupt and steep-faced pile of feruginous sandstone facing the south and the river. Under its rocky ramparts the old trail lay in sight for many miles in both directions from the top of the rock. Here during the history of the trail, both old and more recent, was a great danger point, and many bitter fights took place on or near it. It lay in the very heart of the summer buffalo range and in a country claimed by several hostile tribes, but dominated by no one alone.

Pawnees and Cheyennes, hereditary enemies, slaughtered each other here; Arapahos, Kiowas, Comanches and even the Utes visited it, while it is said that the far-away Apaches were not strangers to it. Here, it is said, Kit Carson, a youth with Ceran St. Vrain's fur caravan, killed his first Indian in 1826. In the olden days the face of the rock served as a prairie register, being covered with the names of passing travelers.

Ash Creek came next, nineteen miles west of the Walnut. It was four or five paces wide, its water coffee-colored when there was any at all, and its banks had a timid fringe of small trees. Six miles farther on lay Pawnee Creek, where the trail crossed in the form of a horseshoe, forced to cross twice because of a sharp bend in the bed. It was a mean crossing under the best of conditions, but when Ash Creek was dry and the animals had not slaked their thirst since leaving the Walnut, they often rushed the creek in a stampede which threatened the safety of the wagons and their contents. The city of Larned, Kansas, now encircles the old ford. Here was the beginning of the desert section of the trail, and here the buffalo grass became plentiful, and was plentifully dotted with cacti and thistles.

Coon Creeks, little and big, were next to be met with, their waters resembling pea soup, and their currents small and sluggish. The course of Big Coon Creek ran parallel with that of the Arkansas and only a short distance from it, a prairie ridge separating the two. In no land but a semi-arid one would some of these creeks have been noticed; but on the high Kansas prairies a rill is a brook, a brook a creek, and a creek a river. In the earliest of the trail days it was said that Big Coon Creek was one hundred feet wide; when I saw it, a good running jump would clear it in many places. Its banks were timberless.



THE Lower Crossing of the Arkansas! Here was the point where the first users of the Dry Route crossed the river and struck into the disheartening sand hills for the long haul across the desert to the Cimarron. It lay near the mouth of Mulberry Creek, below the present Dodge City, and it was soon abandoned for a shorter route across the desert. We will pass this point without crossing and keep on along the north bank of the river, reaching the Caches, thirty-six miles west of Coon Creek, where Baird and Chambers buried their goods, and unwittingly gave rise to one of the earlier-named and famous places along the route. They are said to have been about five miles west of Dodge City, but eaten away by the Arkansas.

Now comes a famous ford, the Lower Cimarron Crossing, three hundred and eighty-seven miles from Independence and half-way between it and Santa Fé. The old trail, forced by the brush and scrub timber of the river bottom, swung away from the Arkansas and detoured over the prairie swells, returning to the stream to cross at this point. On this north bank was a famous camp spot, where gear was looked to and everything overhauled for the trying desert trip ahead. The banks of the river were four or five feet high, their sides perpendicular. Cutting through these, the teams were then set in motion and driven with a rush into and across the stream. To stop for a moment was to become mired in the quicksands, and the excitement of this fording kept things at a white heat until the last wagon was over. From the ford the road lay straight as an arrow to and over the sandy ridges in the south, where to this day bare spots in the thin grass covering lay bright in the sun.

Those trains which preferred the Upper Cimarron Crossing, kept on along the mountain division of the trail, which turned off here, and traveled on to the site of the present town of Ingalls, Kansas, keeping well back from the river bottom, and swinging southwesterly down the slope of the last ridge to camp here and to cross. After fording the river the trail went on, into and over the southern sand hills and joined that from the Lower Crossing, and both went on as one trail.

Here we have our last chance to choose our route. We must either take the Cimarron or Dry Route, or keep to the north

bank of the Arkansas, pass Bent's Fort, cross a little above it, and tackle the dividing ridge between the Purgatoire and Timpass Creek. If we choose the latter route we will have to face the passage of the Raton Mountains, through the rough and wild Raton Pass. It is a longer way, a harder haul and even worse on the animals than the arid sands of the Cimarron short-cut.

From one of these Cimarron Crossings, then, let us push into the southwest and tackle the deep sand and the steep and treacherous slopes of the sides of the dunes. For several miles this slow and teetering progress endures and then the hills flatten out and we proceed at more ease. The first water we may hope to find is Sand Creek, fifty miles away, usually dry as a bone. We drive late into the evenings now and corral by lantern light; and we hope for a dew to wet the scanty grazing and cut down the growing thirst of the animals. On again before dawn we struggle doggedly through the second day, praying that there may be a pool or two in Sand Creek, or that water may be obtained by digging in its bed. At last the Cimarron draws near.

We come to a great, sandy wash, lying at the bottom of a wide valley. This is the Cimarron River, guiltless of water, and looking but little different from Sand Creek; but at the springs we find water enough, and by digging down a few feet in the sandy bed we make sumps into which water slowly trickles.

Thirty-six miles up the capricious Cimarron lies Middle Spring, where water always has been found. Here we are fairly in the Comanche country, and have been for several days. Reaching Middle Spring we camp, and early the following morning push on for Willow Bar, twenty-six miles up the Cimarron Valley.

Wet weather is found here, with steady drizzle and a fall of stinging hail. Indians are numerous, anxious to trade, and are keeping covetous eyes on our horses and mules. The guards are more alert, and sometimes doubled at night, and a whisper of apprehension runs from camp-fire to camp-fire. No one of the better informed fears for his scalp; but to have the animals run off is to be stranded helplessly in the middle of nowhere with useless wagons heavily loaded with trade treasures. We push on eagerly, and after a drive of eighteen miles reach the Upper Spring, where Mexican troops sometimes wait for the trains.

This spring is never failing and it marks the place where some of the traders are making preparations to leave the train and push on to Santa Fé to do what they can with customs house and merchants. Five miles past Upper Spring we reach Cold Spring, where the road leaves the treacherous Cimarron and heads for the waters of the Canadian.

McNees' Creek, twenty-five miles farther on, was named from the death of McNees and Munroe, at the hands of Indians, in 1825. Twenty miles farther and Rabbit Ear Creek comes in view, with Rabbit Ear Mounds near it. Eight miles more and Round Mound is reached and skirted, and camp made without water for the animals. Another eight miles and we reach Rock Creek, and the train then strings out for Point of Rocks, nineteen miles away, which wears the brand of infamy from Indian ambushes and bitter fights around the cold spring which bursts forth from the rocks under the threatening point projecting from the north.

THE main Canadian, twenty miles ahead, is scarcely more than a brook, and is forded over a rock bottom and its gently sloping banks are easily mastered. We are now drawing close to the settlements and need not be surprised if we see occasional horsemen near the road. Six miles beyond is the Ocate, half a dozen feet wide at the bottom, eight to fifteen across at the top, and with black, perpendicular banks from six to ten feet high. Its bottom is miry and hard work is needed to get the heavy wagons across and up the cut bank on the other side. Ahead is the Wagon Mound, a most remarkable natural imitation of a covered wagon perched massively on the north end of a great, sloping-sided mesa. It is now a station on the Santa Fé Railroad, and the mound lies close to the tracks on the east.

Another junction is reached about fifteen miles past the Wagon Mound, for at Santa Clara Spring the Taos Trail comes in from the west and a little northerly; and down from the north, via Raton Pass, leads the mountain division of the Santa Fé Trail, from the upper Arkansas and Bent's Fort. Twenty-two miles farther is the Rio Mora and the first of the Mexican settlements. After the year 1832 we see sheep, cattle and goats; and in 1847 the

town was burned by the Americans. This stream is the last of the waters of the Canadian, and we begin to attain altitude steadily but slowly, reaching the Gallinas River and the first waters of the Rio Pecos.

Next comes Ojo de Bernal, a spring seventeen miles farther on our way, and six miles past this is San Miguel on the Pecos, itself.

After rough and rocky progress over twenty-three miles of very bad road we come to the outskirts of Pecos Village and its ruined church; and twenty-five miles more brings us to Santa Fé, and the end of our long journey. From the ridge it lies below us and looks for all the world like a messy and huddled fleet of mud-colored canal boats. The trail at last crosses Santa Fé Creek, a pure and limpid stream over a gravel bottom, and enters the town proper along what is now College Street. It turns a corner or two and stops in the Plaza, facing the governor's adobe "palace."

In the days of the old trail the plaza was a bare earth and sand square without a blade of grass or a green leaf, and was covered with wind-blown litter. Our arrival is the cue for excitement among the inhabitants, and we sigh with relief as we unhitch the animals preparatory to driving them somewhere outside the city to graze and rest.

In the days of the early trail Indian troubles amounted to little more than attempted theft of the horses and mules. Pawnees and Comanches made a great fuss and a show of warlike evolutions, but were glad enough to beg gifts and to trade. How long this immunity from scalp-lifting would have continued if the Indians had not been murdered is not known; but tenderfeet itched to use their expensive sporting pieces and, in lieu of game, were tempted to take pot shots at curious and peaceful savages. A few experiences of this nature served to arouse the savages to retaliate, and the troubles grew slowly.

At one time a white man could safely make that journey alone, being concerned mostly for the safety of his horse and goods rather than for his hair. In the twenty-two years between the beginning of the trade and the temporary closing of the customs houses but seven men were killed with the caravans.

We have had fair luck on our journey from Independence and we have taken our ten-mule-team wagon, with its five thousand pounds of calicoes, cheaper domestic cottons, and a small assortment of hardware, over nearly eight hundred miles of trail in a little over two months. It might be that we smuggled in a little tobacco as a protest against Armijo's wagon tax, but as to that—*Quien sabe?*

It is fitting that I acknowledge my indebtedness for data to Gregg, Bancroft, Sage, Fremont, Parkman, Emory, Wislizenus, Bryant, Ruxton, and Garrard.

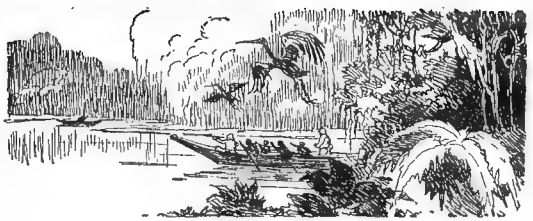
"THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS"

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER was wrong; the last of the Mohicans did not fall with Uncas; a small but respectable remnant of the tribe remains to-day. A few are at Schagticook, near the New York-Massachusetts line, but the greater part are in Wisconsin, where, masquerading under the name of "Stockbridges" they may be found in two communities, one in Calumet County, near the east shore of Lake Winnebago, the other on the southwest corner of the Menominee Reservation in Shawano County.

The original home of the Mohicans, or Mahikans, as they are perhaps more correctly called, was on both banks of the Hudson River, below Albany, New York. The name Mahikan means "Wolf" and this tribe was called "Loup" or Wolf, by the French. They were prominent in Dutch colonial days, and as late as the War of the Revolution were numerous enough to put a considerable body in the field under Washington on the patriot side.

Daniel Nimham, the Mahikan chief, was cut off with most of his men by British cavalry, near Kingsbridge, and died fighting to the last. Some of his warriors succeeded in pulling the troopers from their horses and killing them with their hands. This ended the fighting strength of the tribe, and in the early part of the nineteenth century they withdrew with the Oneida Indians to Wisconsin, where their descendants are still to be found on land which they purchased from the Menominees.

While greatly mixed with white and negro blood, some "Stockbridges" still survive who present the appearance of being full Indians. The members of the Quinney family, in particular, some of whom were actually born on the Hudson, in New York, are typical Eastern Algonkian Indians. They still possess the memory of a few words of their language, and some wampums, wooden bowls and other articles of Indian manufacture that came from their old home in the East.—A. S.



TWISTING ROOTS

By ELMER BROWN MASON

The Wet Jungle of Borneo, where all is hate and decay and death—even it may serve to untangle the snarled threads of Life

LI FO, the old Chinaman who ran the place, had named it the House of Unending Happiness and Delight, but white men called it the Devil's Club.

A big, rambling, nipa thatched structure built on piles over the mud of low tide, it differed only in size from the other houses of the native residents of Brunei. Europeans occasionally patronized it, first mates and a few captains mostly, but it was primarily a gathering place for natives—if Chinese, Dyaks, Muruts, all the riffraff of races that sail the seas about Borneo are to be lumped together as natives.

Fan-tan was always going on, of course, and there were also roulette and faro tables, but those who didn't gamble were quite free to watch the show. Dyak girls—their teeth blackened and ornamented with gold stars set in the enamel, ears bored round the edges with holes from which dangled rings and pendants—waved their long, graceful hands and writhed to the slow, sinful beat of the native drums. Enormously fat wrestlers pawed one another about a padded ring. Little Nipponese, eternally smiling, played toy-like banjoes.

But in addition to all the ordered Oriental ceremonial and wickedness there was something else, there was—well, a queerness! And this queerness radiated directly from Li Fo.

He looked to be a thousand years old. In all the native dialects of this coast of many races a strange tale was whispered about him: that he had always been in North Borneo, even before the English took it over; before Sir James Brooke came to Sarawak in the days when there were no Europeans, and the Chinese looked upon Borneo as their private treasure house whence they drew rattan, teak, precious stones and gold.

And Li Fo looked the part! Time had engraved his face with a network of wrinkles, deep ones about the eyes and mouth, finer lines crisscrossing his cheeks and chin and forehead. There were wrinkles of grief, wrinkles of anxiety and watchfulness and care, wrinkles of pain, and over them all patience, infinite patience, was drawn like a mask. He was like something out of a child's story-book, something fantastic and unbelievable, as he moved about the crowded, jostling rooms in his embroidered satins; his hands, like fine old yellow ivory, hanging at his sides or hidden in the folds of his flowing sleeves. He was China, China with its long, long memories, its mysticism. About him Yang and Yin, spirits of light and darkness, circled in their invisible and eternal conflict, while the ghosts of gongs, cymbals and drums thundered, clashed and sounded silently. China walked the world, smiling gravely, patiently, at the childish haste of the younger peoples.

SOME globe-trotter once called Brunei the "Venice of the East." He was no more blind than most globe-trotters. Venice is a white-haired, aristocratic old lady, who smiles pleasantly on the Adriatic as she sits dreaming of her past; Brunei is a witch, a very old, very tired witch, who crouches with her feet in the waters of the South China Sea wearily brewing poison for foreigners.

At any rate that is the impression she gave Harford Venning, and he rather wished that he had not come. Sitting at a table in the European Club he wondered if the tales of the Bornean jungle—the insects, noises, the unbelievable loveliness of orchids, the gloom, the creatures which writhed underfoot, the horror of it, the beauty of it—as they had been told to him were but other felicitous globe-trotter phrases. Certainly no one in Brunei cared to talk about it. Venning began to think that the white residents considered it bad form to refer to the jungle. Possibly on the principle of a thing ceasing to exist if you shut your eyes to it.

Yet, as he recalled his day's wanderings around Brunei, it seemed to him he had felt keenly every moment as though he were on the verge of something new and startling, like a man who cannot find the key that opens the secret door. If he had only possessed the linguistic ability to talk with the natives——

"If you don't mind?" a voice broke in on his musings, and a man slipped into the chair across from him.

"It's quite all right," Venning answered automatically, as he mentally cataloged the stranger. He was tall, broad, burned nearly black, obviously an outdoor man, obviously a soldier as the Mons ribbon in his buttonhole indicated. His eyes followed Venning's to the bit of color.

"You in the show?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes," Venning admitted. "Didn't get in till after Mons, though."

"Few around here got in at all," the stranger stated grimly, "I say, my name's —Smith, constabulary billet; don't get to Brunei often. Let's have a drink."

"Venning's mine. Here on the loose. Thought I might pick up something interesting for a magazine article, but Brunei seems rather cut and dried, just the usual thing."

"Not quite that," Smith objected; "that is, the real Brunei isn't. Have you been to the Devil's Club?"

"No, I haven't," Venning admitted. "It sounds exactly the place I should like to go, though."

"Righto," Smith agreed, "I'm for a bit of a flutter, too, and Li Fo accommodates with any game one cares to mention. We'll finish our drinks and toddle along."

In the House of Unending Happiness and Delight it took Smith but a few minutes to drop twenty pounds at roulette, after which the two men sat at a table watching the show and talking. Venning's interest was equally divided between what was going on around him and the constabulary officer. It was plain that the bronzed outdoor man was suffering for want of companionship of his own kind; this Venning understood quite well from what he had seen of the employees of the British North Borneo Company who made up the bulk of the white residents. His principal job, it transpired, was to discourage local head-hunting jamborees among the natives and to keep white men, other than the accredited employees of the B. N. B. Company, out of the interior. He was, naturally, reserved on the latter subject but talked freely and well of the jungle. Soon Venning quite forgot his surroundings and was listening avidly to tales of strange beasts, native orgies, weird reptiles and marvelous flowers until the crowd began to thin.

"What a frightful lot of jawing I've been doing," Smith finally said apologetically, and rose to his feet. "Good night, Li Fo."

"It's really the only interesting stuff I've heard about Borneo," Venning answered. "What you've told me and this—this Devil's Club. Do you come here often?"

"When I'm in Brunei," Smith answered carelessly, "I like to gamble; and there's no other form of amusement here any way. What do you really think of the place?"

"I'm not quite sure," Venning answered. "Of course it's more or less the kind of a thing one expects to find on this coast—all except the proprietor."

"Li Fo? Yes, of course. Singular old fish. Natives are mortally afraid of him. Credit him with being some sort of a sorcerer, I believe."

"I can easily understand that after seeing him," Venning agreed as they went up the steps of the European Club. "I say, let's stop for a drink before we turn in!"

A score of clean-looking Englishmen

were sitting about the tables in the big quiet room. The white-drill-clad China boys who flitted noiselessly to and fro taking orders were as different from those of the Devil's Club as an English butler is from a snake charmer. Venning's mind was busy with the contrast between the place he had just left and his present surroundings when a man at a nearby table attracted his attention. He was staring at the unconscious Smith, terror, amazement, incredulity leaving their footprints on his face for all to read. Finally, his expression changed to stark horror; he rose abruptly from his chair and hurried toward the door.

"Who is that chap?" Venning nodded in the direction of the disappearing figure. "There—just going out the door."

Smith glanced up carelessly, then stiffened in his seat. Venning caught his breath as he watched him. The big man's eyes were the eyes of a lost soul; there was a bitterness of hate in them, a cold fury of hate welling up from some private frozen hell beneath. Just a flash, then the face was again expressionless.

"Can't say that I know him," the answer came in even tones. "Shall we go?"

Venning nodded and rose. At that very moment the same man who had stared at Smith re-appeared in the dorway. For a moment he hesitated, then came straight across the floor.

"Aren't —aren't you Captain Alden-Rice?" he asked, but he did not hold out his hand. "I'm—I'm Hammersley."

The constabulary officer met his eyes steadily and his voice was very quiet.

"My name's Smith," he said. "I think you have made a mistake."

The young Englishman—he was very young—stared, then flushed crimson.

"But I—I—" he began; then was silent as Smith rose and turned his back.

"Think I'll turn in now," he remarked calmly. "I'm off to an unruly native village the first thing in the morning."

The two men walked in silence toward their rooms in the rear of the club.

"Shall you be back soon?" Venning hazarded. He hated to lose the only man he had found companionable in all of Brunei.

"Quite soon. Week or ten days. I say," he answered the unspoken request in Venning's eyes, "would you care to come along for the trip?"

"Rather!" Venning answered sincerely.

"Righto. You'd do well to get a couple of hours' sleep. We push off around four."

IT WAS not quite four o'clock when the two men nibbled toast and fruit and gulped down scalding tea in that silence which the hours just before dawn seem to impose on mankind.

"Ready?" the constabulary officer asked finally, and his companion nodded.

A tall native came into the breakfast room and headed straight for the table. With something that approached a military salute he held out a paper.

"Smith *tuan*," he said.

Smith ran through the message, then spoke for several minutes in some slurring native tongue. The messenger again saluted as he turned to go.

"Sorry, but I'm off on another tack. Must run down a Chinaman who has headed back into the hinterland."

"It sounds even more interesting than the native village," Venning commented.

"I say—I warn you, though, it's a beastly trip. Capital chance if you want to see the Wet Jungle, though."

"I do," Venning said emphatically.

Venning's conception of a tropical jungle as a place through which one walked or rode, perhaps on the backs of great swaying elephants, received a prompt disillusionment. Behind Brunei stretches a seemingly interminable marsh, cut by narrow channels and broadening here and there into ponds and small lakes. Over the first open stretch the paddles dipped softly into the amber water which glistened on the blades in the first faint glow of sunrise, the four Muruts driving the slim native boat swiftly onward without apparent effort. Suddenly across the surface of the water there darted a swift flight of tiny wings, gold, azure, crimson. Butterflies Venning thought them, until he knocked one into his lap and found that it was a humming bird. There were thousands of them, unbelievably lovely, flashing everywhere, showing every hue of the spectrum as they whirled and darted.

Then, like a pall, the jungle closed suddenly about the boat. There were no more humming birds. No sunrays penetrated the vaporish fever-threatening gloom. The trees stood so closely together that root intertwined with root in the dark, evil-smelling water. There were dense thickets of rattan, an underbrush of thorny shrubs with great uncanny waxy flowers, funereal white or blazing a loathsome crimson. Dark, slimy-green vegetation strug-

gled upward, striving toward the light, mixed with stiff, black, tortured plants like twisted withered hands. The boat seemed to be cutting a path through life that crawled or writhed or wiggled to escape it, then closed in behind in a solid sentient mass.

From the trees above immense insects rained down; enormous, distorted, incredible insects. Overside little stretches of bubbling mud broke apart to reveal masses of twisting, worm-like creatures or the wriggling passage of a snake. Orchids were everywhere, a bewildering profusion. Every rotting tree trunk or bending branch was covered with them. They hung there in the noisome gloom like condemned souls, too vile for hell, who must forever writhe and twist in hopeless agony.

Venning's head began to swim in the fetid air. He felt vaguely that he was looking on something that it was not well for men to see: Nature at work in her reeking laboratory, pouring out life, a blind, resistless force.

Venning turned his eyes for relief to Smith. He was sitting a little apart, his face expressionless. Now and then, leaning forward, he gave some command to the Muruts in their native tongue, then resumed smoking. With startling force, it suddenly dawned on the watcher that Smith's work lay there, in that same incredible place where every leaf was poisonous; where the branch of every tree, every hummock of mud concealed a silent, deadly threat. He found himself speculating on what such an environment would do to a man, a man like this quiet constabulary officer. Then, in a flash, he remembered the hate that had leaped so suddenly into Smith's eyes the night before, and had been as suddenly blotted out. Hate, hate, that was the word for which he had been unconsciously groping! That was the word that epitomized what he was passing through—hate, lurking in the foul water, in the trees, in the very flowers; hate that crouched waiting, waiting.

For two hours the boat wound through the dark jungle labyrinth, then slid into a small lake bright with sunshine and brilliant with the changing colors of the humming birds flashing over it. At the upper end the paddlers pushed into the dense undergrowth, then lay down in the bottom of the boat, exhausted and panting.

"We'll wait for our man here," Smith volunteered.

Venning glanced at him quickly. Smith's voice had sounded odd, as though it were saturated with the menace through which they had come. Then Venning told himself that he must shake off this uncomfortable obsession, try to regain a normal viewpoint. After all, it was but jungle.

"What has your man done?" he heard himself ask.

"Tried to cut away without paying his fifty percent tax to the British North Borneo Company. He kept an opium dive."

"Fifty percent tax! Trying to discourage the industry?"

"No," Smith replied calmly; "to increase dividends."

The answer offended Venning, though, for the life of him, he couldn't put his finger on any reason for his feeling. He fought it down and changed the subject.

"How do you know he will come through here?"

"It's the only way for him to get into the hinterland. My Muruts know every foot of this marsh; we took a short-cut. It's not possible for anyone to outwit us here."

Again Venning fought down a feeling of unjustified offense at the other man's words. He opened his mouth to speak again, then shut it and watched an enormous red spider which dropped into the boat, then hopped off on the water across which it walked as though its feet were pontoons. The surface broke suddenly; a snake-like fish snatched the spider under; then a blunt alligator snout opened and closed on the fish. A swirl of water; the surface smoothed.

"Jolly spot; so—so peaceful," Venning said through his teeth.

Smith nodded, but did not look up.

"Breathes hate," he said carelessly. "Every living thing preys on every other living thing, snakes, birds, animals, insects. Even my Muruts take to quarreling in the Wet Jungle."

Venning did not trust himself to speak. He knew definitely now that he detested Smith as much as he hated everything about the teeming life created only to destroy, the humming birds colliding vindictively in mid-air. Yes, he even hated the humming birds.

Smith rose suddenly from the bottom of the boat, a rifle at his shoulder, and sent a bullet through the bow of a flimsy craft which had appeared on the surface of the lake as if by magic. He shouted a few words in Chinese. There wasn't the slightest attempt at resistance. In a few moments a Chinaman was sitting forward with the Muruts, and the boat had headed back into the jungle.

"What will they do with him?" Venning nodded toward the impassive figure in the bow.

"Twenty years. Hard labor."

There was a long silence. Venning struggled against the oppression that bore down on him with the jungle gloom, fought for actual self-control. In spite of himself, however, his jangled nerves forced him to speech.

"By the Lord, Smith, I don't see how you stand this place," he said. "If I were to spend a year here I'd be hating everything in the world! I can feel it now, while I'm talking, as if I were actually swelling up with hate like one of those loathsome spiders!"

"Yes, one does hate," the constabulary officer answered tonelessly. He was staring ahead of him up the dim waterway like a man who holds a picture steadily before his eyes. "You're wrong about 'everything' though. One's hate doesn't spread around. It concentrates. After a bit one feels it, dropping softly like the jungle—*drip! drip! drip!*—always in the same spot."

Venning shivered in spite of the foul heat which laved his body. There was something in Smith's voice that made the back of his neck feel cold while little prickles ran along his spine.

"It passes—from the surface," the toneless voice went on, "leaving it smooth, like this water, but underneath—" He laughed suddenly, a harsh laugh not good to hear. When he spoke again it was in a normal tone. "What rot I'm talking! You'll be right as rain once we get out of this."

There was a change when the boat was free of the Wet Jungle and crossing the stretch of amber water reaching to Brunei. As Venning ceased hating the humming birds, they ceased to clash maliciously in mid-air but danced joyously over the water.

BATHED and dressed, Venning felt quite a different man as he sat in the dining-room of the European Club mentally reviewing the events of the day. It had been an interesting experience, but an experience that he would not care to repeat. He looked up to see one of the British North Borneo Company clerks sauntering over to his table, a fussy little man whose entire business in life seemed to be to know everyone.

"Hear 'bout the killin' last night?" he inquired amiably.

"No. Who was killed?" Venning asked coldly.

Far from being snubbed, the little clerk haw-hawed appreciatively.

"I don't mean murder—bloody doin's an' all that," he explained. "Killin' at faro. Young Hammersley, chap who came in on the *Veronica* yesterday, made the biggest killin' ever been known at the Devil's Club."

"I didn't see any heavy play and I was there most of the evening," Venning answered, interested in spite of himself.

"Crowd of us went over rather late. Fact is, I saw you come in here just before we left. Li Fo wasn't keen 'bout startin' the faro table again. Rum old chap! Must have felt how things were goin', what! At any rate, Hammersley cleaned up more than a thousand pounds."

"What is that you said?" Smith's voice asked sharply. He had come to the table so silently that neither Venning nor the clerk had noticed his approach.

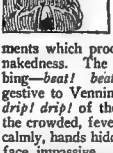
"Oh, I say! Haven't you heard, either? Young Hammersley, sportin' chap who blew in here yesterday, won a thousand pounds at Li Fo's last night."

Venning glanced at Smith, then quickly away again.

"Sit down and have a drink," he suggested to the little clerk for want of something better to say.

"Sorry, got to toddle 'long," the little man excused himself. "Fact is, Hammersley's givin' a dinner to the crowd tonight. Rather think we'll look in at the Devil's Club later in the evenin'. Shall you be there?"

"Yes, we shan't miss it," Smith answered quietly.



IT WAS late when the two friends reached the House of Unending Happiness and Delight, but the rooms were crowded. A new dancing act was on, Siamese girls, muffled in garments which produced a curious effect of nakedness. The little drums were throbbing—*beat! beat! beat!*—suddenly suggestive to Venning of the poisonous *drip! drip! drip!* of the Wet Jungle. Through the crowded, feverish rooms Li Fo walked calmly, hands hidden in his flowing sleeves, face impassive. Venning's eyes followed him until he paused at a faro table farther

down the room. There were a dozen white men about it, very quiet white men, and in their midst was Hammersley.

If Smith saw Hammersley just then, he gave no sign of it but joined a party of trippers from the *Veronica* who stood around the roulette table. Directly opposite him a young woman was betting American greenbacks steadily on the seventeen and as steadily losing. A Frenchman was volubly explaining to all who cared to listen the merits of a system which was not working. A heavily-built Jew was impassively betting gold-pieces and winning as impassively. Several Chinamen were playing, their faces as devoid of expression as so many carved mandarins. The Chinese croupier, as though with one single gesture, had the board cleared when the little ivory ball stopped spinning, the winning bets paid and the ball in motion once more.

Smith leaned forward and put a five-pound note on the seventeen. The ball clicked as it ran down, hesitated, then plunged into compartment seventeen.

Impulsively Venning put a hand on Smith's arm. It was a big winning, one hundred and eighty pounds. Smith gathered up the notes while the ball was set spinning again and placed ten pounds, Li Fo's limit, on the same number. Again it came up!

"I'm going to make ten more bets, Venning," Smith's emotionless voice was speaking. "Do you mind calling the numbers?"

Venning wanted to say, "Seven." It was madness to think that seventeen would win again, and yet— He heard himself saying, "Seventeen," as the ball began to slow up in the wheel. Smith dropped a ten-pound note on the seventeen—and won again.

Venning became conscious of some disturbance around the faro table down the room; the game had been broken up. Smith was speaking to him and he brought his mind back to roulette.

"Number? Number, quick?"

"Two!" The syllable was automatic, and the two won!

Venning should never have believed what followed had he not taken part in it. Of the ten numbers he called seven won!

Smith pushed his way out from the crowd around the table, stuffing his winnings into several pockets. Venning was at his elbow. As the two men began to make their way across the room they ran into the little B. N. B. Company clerk.

"I say!" he gasped. "No end of a row! Hammersley lost. More than four thousand pounds! Wanted to play on, but Li Fo wouldn't take his check for more than three thousand. He made no end of a row, took it hard. Drinkin' a bit too much, of course."

"Where is he now—Hammersley?" Smith asked sharply.

"Don't know. Somewhere 'bout the place. Drinkin' I suppose. I say, do you think——"

The constabulary officer turned his back abruptly on the little clerk, made his way to a doorway at the upper end of the room, and, lifting a heavy curtain, went in. Venning followed him.

THE room in which Venning found himself was like nothing on earth he had ever seen or dreamed. It was in a way like stepping suddenly into a museum, except that in a museum one knows one is still living in the present. This room was part of the past, the past of hardly known races. The air seemed heavy with old, old memories; memories of dead hopes, joys, sorrows seemed to drift by on the heavy smoke of incense burning before a squat gilt god.

There were little tables all about, tables on which were a thousand curious things: ghost daggers, Thibetan prayer wheels, ivory tablets inlaid with gold characters. Devil masks grinned from the jade and turquoise and sulphur-hued hangings of the walls. There were little figures of Buddha everywhere, and tiny altars of lacquer. On a great table, a magnificently carved Buddha meditated in his jeweled shrine. Along the opposite wall on a crimson panel fantastic devils grimaced and capered derisively. The floor was covered deep with rugs, old, tired-looking rugs that closed softly about human footsteps and blurred them into silence. At one end of the room, before a wonderful table of carved ebony, sat Li Fo.

Smith walked over to him.

"I believe you are holding a check, signed Hammersley, for three thousand pounds. Am I right?"

Li Fo inclined his head.

"I want it." The Englishman began pulling notes from his pockets and arranging them in piles according to their denominations.

Li Fo watched him silently.

"I want it," Smith repeated.

"Who shall hold a running river with his hands, or bid a cloud stand still?" The words fell softly. The old, old Chinaman was gazing steadily at Smith. There was compassion on his face and something of the look of one who watches a wayward child destroying his toys.

"I'm forty-five pounds short." The constabulary officer finished arranging the notes and glanced up at Li Fo. "You will take my *chit* for that amount?"

"How the weary soul tosses to and fro on the waters of illusion!" Venning had heard the old Buddhist saying before, but, spoken in Li Fo's voice, it suddenly took on life and meaning. "If you wish, later, I will take the *chit*," the Chinaman continued, "but now I would talk with you."

Smith looked up, frowning impatiently.

"There's nothing to talk about, although I might tell you, incidentally, that the Hammersley check isn't worth the paper it's written on."

"Captain Alden-Rice." The Englishman started at the name but did not speak. A fragile, ivory-yellow hand waved toward a nearby chair and Smith dropped into it. "The wheel turns slowly," went on the quiet voice. "The red mists of hate pass and desire fades as a shadow. Just is the wheel! This sorrowful youth who now drains the cup of madness has sinned against you. I am right?" The words were a statement rather than a question.

"You are right." The veins stood out like cords on Smith's forehead; his fingers opened and closed spasmodically. "However, I do not see that these things concern you, Li Fo. Give me the check."

"And his sin you have borne? It has made you outcast?"

"How do you know all this?" The voice was hoarse and challenging.

"When the soul goes free, wheeling above the world, it sees many things. He wrote your name to a piece of paper like this," yellow fingers touched the check, "and because he was young and son of your dead father's brother you did not tell that it was he who wrote your name, even when that name was dishonored. For his sin you were driven from among your people, guilty in all eyes. So runs the record that I read."

"Yes," the word was a whisper, a thin red thread of hate, "so runs the record."

"And this," with an almost imperceptible movement the old Chinaman indicated the slip of paper on the table before him, "will deliver him into your hands. You no longer feel that you must save him. With it you will destroy him?"

"That is my affair. The debt shall be wiped out—in my own way."

"How?"

"How? I have my own plans. Will you please give me the check? Now!"

Li Fo studied the face before him.

"Who shall follow the flight of a lie," he said softly, "or the twisting roots of evil which strike and wind about the soul, dragging it ever downward to foul sin? Is it your wish, Captain Alden-Rice, to be re-born again and yet again? As a scorpion, perhaps? As one of the great centipedes that crawl through the jungle wetness, expiating——" He paused.

"The jungle!" Smith whispered. "Yes, that is where he drove me. Now I shall take *him* to the jungle. Look here!" his voice suddenly changed to sharpness. "Be good enough to give me that club, Li Fo. I'll send you a *chit* in the morning for the amount that remains due."

The old Chinaman sighed, lifted the slip of paper from the table and passed it to Smith; then, half turning, he clasped his hands.

"Oh Thou who holdest the keys of the Sacred Things," he intoned, "Thou who knowest what is in the dry land and in the sea and in the hearts of men, Thou who knowest how evil must be purged, keep Thou this soul from sin! Thou who knowest there is no grief like hate, free Thou this soul from prison. Just is the wheel!"

THE voice ceased. In the silence which followed Venning could hear the frantic pounding of his heart. The prayer wheels grew hazy before his eyes. The many colored curtains swayed. Unseen forces pressed about him, whispering, whispering. Gongs thundered in his ears, cymbals clashed, drums rattled. Yang and Yin passed by in their eternal conflict, melted and disappeared in the incense smoke which rose and floated upward—and through that incense smoke he sensed, rather than saw, the white face of Hammersley staring in upon them.

The haze lifted. Venning looked for the face, but it was no longer there. He stared stupidly at Li Fo, who still sat smil-

ing patiently, a little wearily, at Smith who was turning the check over and over in his hands.

A fear verging on physical sickness came over Venning.

"Let's go away," he gasped. "Oh, please, let's go away!"

The crowd had thinned to a few knots of people about the tables. As they came out the little B. N. B. clerk faced them.

"That bounder Hammersley is vilely potted," he complained nervously.

"Where is Hammersley now?" Smith asked quietly.

"No idea. Came staggerin' out here, said he was goin' huntin' vipers in the jungle, knocked a Murut overboard an' pushed off in his boat. Strictly speakin', there aren't any vipers in the jungle, of course. You chaps will bear me out I hardly knew him, what?"

Smith did not answer; he beckoned to Venning.

"We'll have to follow along," he said in the boat that carried them to dry land. "If we lose track of him he'll be lost for good—and I have a word to say to him."

Hammersley had left a trail, however. He had secured a bottle of Scotch at the club and gone out again. Smith tarried just long enough to snatch a letter, unstamped and unpostmarked, from the rack, then led the way swiftly through Brunei. Twice he stopped and spoke to natives, then hurried on faster. They reached the place where they had embarked the night before and pushed off in one of several slim native craft that lay on the bank.

"He can't have gone far," Smith spoke in a tired voice. "Tried to get some natives to go with him; aims to push across into Dutch Borneo. Running away from that check, of course. He can't have gone far, as I said. He'll take the only apparent channel—which ends in a *cul de sac*."

A heavy miasmic smell rose from the water. The stillness of just before dawn was over the world.

Smith paddled swiftly and the narrow craft shot into a passage through the Wet Jungle. Instantly Venning was in the grasp of the same obsession that had held him the day before. As he looked at Smith's broad back he hated the constabulary officer. Why should that competent, self-contained man be allowed to wreak a terrible vengeance on a weak, pitiful boy?

A wriggling snake stirred the mud at the side of the boat, raised its sinister head. A bulbous crimson insect fell on Venning's hand and stung him painfully.

"I say, Smith," he began, "can't you forgive——"

Smith jerked suddenly to one side and spoke sharply over his shoulder: "Hit it with a paddle; it's a centipede—deadly poison. Don't let it get on you!"

Venning caught a glimpse of a foot-long, many-legged thing running down the gunwale toward him, then ducked his head as something fell into the boat with a clicking sound. He saw that it was an immense scorpion and, just as he snatched a paddle to strike, it caught the centipede in its lobster-like jaws and whipped over its poisoned tail. The centipede writhed its body around it; then both horrible insects lay still.

The boat floated into a small opening in the jungle over which the humming birds were flashing. Smith raised the dead horrors on his paddle blade and gazed at them.

"Be re-born as a scorpion or a centipede," he slowly repeated Li Fo's words. "Be re-born again and yet again!"

Suddenly he drew the check from his pocket and tore it across in his strong fingers, letting the white fragments float from him. The humming birds swooped down and struck viciously at the fluttering scraps of paper. The constabulary officer turned from them to Venning.

"I had intended to have my revenge, the revenge I have been waiting for all these years, but—well, we'd better be getting on," he said quietly. "That mad boy can't be far ahead."

"What's that?" Venning pointed, his teeth chattering in spite of the heat.

A native canoe was floating, bottom up, ahead of them.

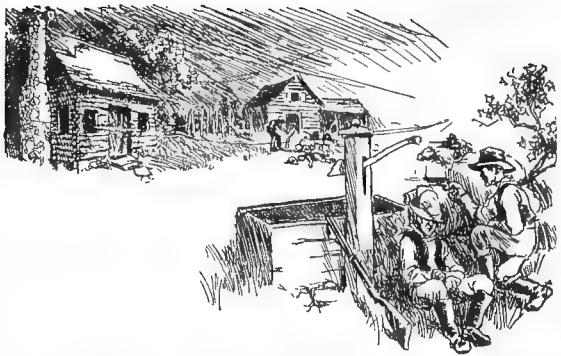
Smith stared for a long moment, then let his eyes sweep slowly over the water, to the right, to the left, his paddle still.

"Aren't you going to look for—it?" Venning's voice shook with horror.

"No use," the other man's voice was gentle. "The mud would sink him down—and the mud is hungrily alive here—hungrily."

He raised his paddle and the unstamped letter slipped from his pocket. Smith picked it up and opened it automatically; his eyes ran over it. It was a face transfigured which he turned to Venning.

"Hammersley finally cleared me at home," he said simply. "I can go back. Li Fo was right. Just is the wheel!"



THE JOHNSON COUNTY CATTLE WAR.

By ARTHUR CHAPMAN

Author of "Jack Slade, Man-Killer," and "Black Jack—Wanted Dead or Alive"

A glorious fight Nate Champion put up against overwhelming odds and in so doing he spelled the end of the cattle kings and the open range in Wyoming; ushered in the day of the settler, the small rancher, and the farmer

IF I was you, Nate Champion, I'd clear outen Wyoming, or these cattle kings'll shore git you ef you don't."

A grizzled trapper, Ben Jones, addressed the words to an athletic, well proportioned man—a cowman, by his attire—who was helping with the breakfast preparations shortly after dawn at the K. C. ranchhouse, on the north fork of Powder River, in Johnson County, Wyoming.

Jones, with a fellow trapper, Bill Walker, had dropped in the night before from the headwaters of the Powder River. After the hospitable fashion of the West, they had been given supper and a bed and were now preparing to "sit in" at the morning meal. A fourth man, a cowpuncher named Nick Ray, was sitting on the edge of his bunk, pulling on his boots.

"Seems as if this country ain't none too safe for any man," continued the trapper, "much less for a feller like you, Nate, that's on the blacklist. Why even Bill an' me, comin' down the river, cut wide circles out in the bresh when we seen a horseman comin' up the road."

Nate Champion only smiled grimly at the trapper's forebodings and continued his work without comment. His rifle was within easy reaching distance in a corner of the room. A heavy revolver hung at his hip, and he looked and acted like a man who could make quick and skillful use of both weapons.

"If they get Nate, it'll be because they come after him in bunches," said Nick Ray, admiringly. "They tried gettin' the drop on him once and come off the worse for it. You know Nate and Ross Gilbertson was livin' at Hall's ranch, up the Powder, and one night two fellers opened the door and began firin', at the same time tell-

in' Nate and Ross to put up their hands. They was that close to Nate's bunk that the powder burned his bedclothes when they shot at him, but he whipped a gun from under his pillow and fired so quick that he wounded one of the men, and both of 'em run like scared jackrabbits."

The trappers nodded understandingly, for they knew of the attack on Champion and Gilbertson. It was one of a long series of such deeds of violence which were the lesser preliminaries to the great Johnson County cattle war. The climax to that war was rapidly approaching; in fact the first act in the drama was to take place in a few minutes where these four men were conversing in this lonely cabin in the Wyoming hills.

"Somebody'll have to get some water," observed Nick Ray, as the bacon began to sizzle in the pan.

"I'll go," said Ben Jones, and disappeared through the doorway.

The three men waited a few minutes, but Jones did not appear, for the very good reason that he was lying bound and gagged near the well, where he had been seized by a little group of heavily armed men.

"It's the fust time I ever knowed Ben to be late for his bacon," observed the other trapper. "I'll step out and see what's keepin' him."

Several minutes passed and neither Jones nor Walker returned.

"Them two trappers must have got to arguin' about poison bait," said Nick Ray. "I s'pose I'll have to drag both of 'em in to their fodder."

"Better be careful, Nick," said Nate Champion. "I don't like the looks of this thing. There may be men down there at the stable."

But the cowboy had stepped out of the door before Nate Champion could more than voice the suspicion that had flashed across his mind. The sun was sending broad pencils of red light through the silvery sage on the plains that stretched eastward. Nick Ray offered a good target, and he had not taken half a dozen steps from the cabin before he fell, pierced by half a dozen bullets.

The echoes of the firing had not died away before Nate Champion appeared in the cabin doorway, rifle in hand. He knew, by the sound of the volley, that the house was surrounded, but the number of his opponents did not deter him an instant. Firing with almost incredible rapidity, he emptied his rifle in the direction of the barn, the corral and the well, where skulking figures could be seen.

Champion's fire was returned from all sides. Bullets fairly rained against the stout logs of the cabin and embedded themselves in the heavy door at his back. It was one man against more than half a hundred, but Nate Champion never flinched. Flinging his smoking rifle into the cabin behind him, he dashed forward and picked up Nick Ray, who was feebly trying to crawl toward him.

As Nate Champion picked up his cowpuncher comrade, the firing seemed to be redoubled. Bullets cut his clothes, but not one drew blood. Staggering back to the cabin with his burden, Champion tenderly deposited Nick Ray in a bunk. He could tell by the blood that oozed from the ghastly wounds that Ray had been fatally hurt. Leaping to a window on the side of the cabin opposite the door, Champion emptied his revolver toward the foothills, behind which, at the headwaters of Powder River, rose the silent sentinels of the Big Horn Mountains. There were men out there—in fact there were men on all sides of the shack. The invasion of Johnson County had begun and the final battle between the stock-owning interests and the rustlers was on.

WITH the coolness of the born fighter, Champion took stock of his resources. He had his own weapons and those of Nick Ray and the two trappers, a small arsenal in its entirety. Also he had plenty of ammunition. But he was one against many, and it seemed impossible to hold off the invaders until help came. There was no other ranch within miles. The road to the north and south was seldom traveled that early in the morning, while along Powder River there was little journeying.

A man of less courage would have surrendered, rather than attempt to fight against such odds. But Champion knew that he had been marked to die, and that if he walked out of the cabin with his hands in the air he would be shot down as Nick Ray had been. He chose to die fighting, if die he must.

Reloading his rifle and arranging all his weapons where they could be most readily reached, Champion took up the work of defense. He walked, catlike, around the single room of the cabin, firing now from

windows and now from the door. Occasionally he stuck a rifle through one of the loopholes which had been cut in the logs, and fired at anything that looked as if it might shelter a man. After he had made the rounds of the cabin in this way, Champion would attend as best he could to his dying companion.

In this way the battle kept up until the middle of the afternoon. Awed by the rapidity and accuracy of Champion's fire, the besiegers were afraid to rush the cabin. They shot through the windows and doorway, and at the blaze of Champion's rifle when he fired from a loophole, thinking that a chance bullet might end the encounter.

Still unscathed, Nate Champion kept up his wonderful defense, hoping against hope that the sound of the firing would attract attention and rouse the countryside. Johnson County was divided into two camps, the great majority being with the so-called "rustler" element, the other side being the large stock interests. If the ranch people could only be aroused, Champion knew that he would soon be rescued.

About 3:30 in the afternoon, Fate intervened in a peculiar way to settle adversely the fate of Champion, though apparently it was holding out a bright ray of hope. A ranchman from the Powder River headwaters, Jack Flagg, and his son came down to the cross-road leading toward Buffalo. The boy was riding in a lumber wagon, and his father followed on horseback. Armed men started in pursuit of Flagg and his son but were held off by the threatening rifle of the ranchman. The horses were cut loose from the wagon, and Flagg and the boy made their escape on horseback.

The besiegers knew they must end the battle quickly. The Flaggs would give the alarm and there would soon be hundreds of armed cowpunchers and ranchmen on the scene, eager to rescue Nate Champion. The wagon which the Flaggs had left behind proved to be the instrument that was to seal Champion's fate. It was loaded with hay and, behind the shelter it afforded, several of the besiegers ran the wagon against the cabin and set fire to it.

Soon the cabin was in flames, and the besiegers waited anxiously for the doomed man to come forth. Minutes passed and still Champion did not appear.

"I don't see how he kin stand that fire any longer," almost groaned a Texas cowpuncher in the besieging force.

Just then the cry went up: "There he goes!"

With his rifle in hand, and in his stocking feet, Nate Champion ran with the speed of a deer toward the draw at the back of the cabin. Once in its shelter, he could make his way to the foothills of the Powder River headwaters and could easily shake off his pursuers. For a few seconds it seemed as if he would make his escape. Bullets whined about him, but he had reached the mouth of the draw when at last he staggered and fell.

A shout of triumph went up as it was seen that Champion was dead. The besiegers flocked about him, and pinned on his breast a paper with the inscription: "Cattle Thieves Beware!"

In Champion's pocket was found a blood-stained notebook, in which he had kept a running account of his fight during the day. This document, every line of which attests Champion's supreme courage in the face of overwhelming odds, read as follows:

Me and Dick was getting breakfast when the attack took place. Two men were with us—Ben Jones and another man. The old man went after water and did not come back. His friend went out to see what was the matter and he did not come back. Nick started out and I told him to look out, as I thought there was someone in the stable and would not let them come back. Nick is shot, but not dead yet. He is awful sick. I must go and wait on him. It is now about two hours since the first shot. Nick is still alive. They are shooting and are all around the house. Boys, there is bullets coming in like hail. Them fellows is in such shape I can't get at them. They are shooting from the stable and river and back of the house. Nick is dead. He died about 9 o'clock. I see a smoke down at the stable. I think they have fired it. I don't think they intend to let me get away this time.

It is now about noon. There is someone in the stable yet. They are throwing a rope out at the door and drawing it back. I wish that duck would get out farther, so I could get a shot at him. Boys, I don't know what they have done to those two fellows that stayed here last night. Boys, I feel pretty lonesome right now. I wish there was someone here with me, so we could watch all sides at once. They may fool around until I get a good shot at them before they leave. It's about three o'clock now. There was a man on a wagon and

one on horseback just passed. They fired on them as they went by. I don't know whether they killed them or not. I seen lots of men come out on horses on the other side of the stable and take after them. I shot at the men in the stable just now. I don't know whether I got any or not. I must go and look out again. It don't look as if there is much show of getting away. I see twelve or fifteen men. One looks like (the name is scratched out). I don't know whether it is or not. I hope they did not catch them fellows that run over the bridge toward Smith's. They are shooting at the house now. If I had a pair of glasses I believe I would know some of those men. They are running back. I've got to look out.

Well, they have just got through shelling the house like hail. I heard them splitting wood. I guess they are going to fire the house tonight. I think I will make a break when night comes, if alive. Shooting again. I think they will fire the house this time. The house is all fired. Good-by, boys, if I never see you again.

Nathan D. Champion

Such was the fate of Nate Champion, the most heroic figure in the Johnson County cattle war.

IN ORDER to understand why Champion was so relentlessly hunted down, and why this armed invasion of Johnson County was planned and executed by the large livestock owning interests, it is necessary to take a look at conditions in northern Wyoming in the early '90's.

At that time the influence of the small settler, or "nester" was just beginning to be felt. The roaring '80's had been years of unbroken prosperity for the great cattle outfits in Wyoming. Such outfits had had everything their own way. The homesteader was practically unknown. The rich lands along the watercourses were open to the stockmen's herds. The net of the barb-wire fence had not yet been spread. Prices were good, and returns on investments were correspondingly high.

Many of the big outfits in Wyoming at that time were owned by foreign capital. British owners seldom saw their ranches except during the summer, when there were great hunting and fishing parties organized, with many guests filling the ranch-houses. On one of these great ranches, the 76, there was a racetrack, where the owners and guests used to amuse themselves betting on the performances of the fastest horses that could be procured.

Late in the '80's came a slump in cattle prices. It was charged that, in order to make a satisfactory showing to stockholders, the herds were "robbed"—that is, the ranch managers sold off young stock which should have been kept. The herds began to deteriorate in number and quality. There were more frantic alarms from agitated stockholders. Then it was charged that cowboys working for the big outfits were encouraged to brand any mavericks they found on the plains, so these cattle could be turned in to the company herds. This led to brand changing; and it was a common remark that some of the most notorious branders in the employ of the big outfits were "walking stiff-legged from carryin' runnin' irons in their boots."

Meanwhile, the small settler was becoming the great problem of the cattle-owners whose profits and methods depended on the maintenance of free grass and open range. The building of the Burlington's western extension brought small farmers, construction men, and their half-lawless hangers-on flocking into the cattle country. At once they homesteaded the best land in the valleys, and soon had a network of barb-wire fences in all the choicest locations. The cry went up that many of these so-called settlers were merely rustlers, who were building up their own herds at the expense of the big outfits. There is no doubt that there was a great deal of cattle-stealing going on at that time to supply the railroad, which afforded an unlimited market for fresh beef. The cattle outfits complained that it was useless to bring a rustler to justice, as a conviction could not be secured. Politicians had organized the newcomers until they outvoted the cattle kings who had previously ruled in Wyoming, and many local officials were in sympathy with the men who elected them, and disposed to decide against the cattle kings in doubtful cases. As direct evidence of rustling is difficult to secure, the cattlemen complained that sheriffs and courts favored the "rustler element."

The cattle owners went to the legislature and put through drastic legislation in their interests. The "maverick bill" made it a felony to brand an animal save in the presence of a representative of the Stockmen's Association. The money raised from the sale of mavericks by the associa-

tion was used to pay round-up expenses and provide for cattle inspection. Another law, passed later on, made it possible for the Stockmen's Association to seize animals which were claimed to be rustled stock and ship them to Cheyenne, where the owner had to go to prove his property.

Legislation did not stop the cattle losses, however. Soon it became evident that the cattle outfits were beginning to take the law into their own hands and to inaugurate a reign of terror. Early in the '90's the state was startled by two lynchings on the Sweetwater, in Carbon County. The victims were Jim Averill, a storekeeper, and Ella Watson, known as "Cattle Kate," a neighbor of Averill's.

It was given out that the herds of Averill and Cattle Kate had increased too rapidly. They were taken out of their homes by masked men and lynched. Wyoming was startled and ashamed to learn that a woman had been the victim of lynchers. The authorities were unsuccessful in running down the members of the lynching party. This crime fanned the bitterness existing between the cattle outfits and the small ranchers—a flame that burned more brightly when, soon after the lynching of Averill and Cattle Kate, Thomas Waggoner, a ranchman near Newcastle, was lynched. Waggoner raised horses, and at the time he met his fate was said to have more than one thousand head of fine horses on his ranch. Like the others, he was accused of a too-rapid increase in his herd.

By this time Northern Wyoming was in a ferment. It was not known where the lightning would strike next. Neighbors became estranged. Charges and countercharges were whispered about. It was a common thing for men to "circle out" when they met each other on the road. Unless one was certain of the identity of an approaching horseman, it was well to give him a wide berth. The stock interests charged that rustling was going on with unabated vigor. In Johnson County, the county seat of which was Buffalo, it was said conditions were at their worst. The county was virtually an armed camp. The Eastern newspapers were full of stories about the strained situation in Northern Wyoming, and in Johnson County in particular, and predictions were freely made that a civil war would result.

Excitement fairly reached the breaking point when, in November, 1891, Orley E. Jones, familiarly known as Ranger Jones, was shot from ambush and killed as he was on his way home from Buffalo to his ranch. Four days later J. A. Tisdale, a ranchman living sixty miles from Buffalo, was ambushed and shot to death on his way home.

The stock owners disclaimed any part in the assassinations. As a matter of fact they had a larger measure in tow even then—nothing less than an armed invasion of Johnson County and a seizure of the court-house at Buffalo, with the forcible ousting of Sheriff Angus from office. This is the boldest coup on record in the history of the West. It consisted of virtual defiance of the laws of the United States, yet it was carried out boldly and openly, almost within the shadow of an army garrison at Fort McKinney.

The invasion of Johnson County was carried out in April, 1892. Agents had been sent to Texas and Idaho to recruit men for the "army" which was to exterminate the rustlers in Northern Wyoming. Others were hired in and near Cheyenne. The Texas contingent was taken to Denver and sent from there to Cheyenne, where it joined the Wyoming and Idaho members. Altogether about seventy men were assembled for the work of invading Johnson County. There was a special train in the yards at Cheyenne. Horses bearing the maverick M, to avoid identifying any outfit, were loaded aboard stock cars. There was a plentiful supply of guns and ammunition.

The men who were recruited for this work were naturally a hard-fighting, desperate lot. Some of them were devil-may-care young cowpunchers, but most had records as killers. Among them was a young cowboy from Arizona—a tall, keen-eyed young fellow who had been a scout in the Apache campaigns and who was known as Tom Horn. Later on, Horn's name was to be feared through the State of Wyoming, when, single-handed, he perpetrated a series of assassinations of sheepmen and ranchmen, in the interests of those who still kept up the fight to leave the range free to cattle. For these crimes he was hanged.

From Cheyenne the invaders went to Casper by train, unloaded their horses, grub-wagons and supplies, and advanced a few miles on the way to Buffalo, stopping at the home of a friendly stockman for dinner. Telegraph wires were cut. One or two travelers who were met on the way were jocularly informed that the party was merely an outfit of surveyors laying out the line of a new railroad.

A SCOUT came in with information that Nate Champion was at Nolan's K. C. ranch on Powder River. This was on the line of march to Buffalo, and it was determined to stop there and eliminate Champion before going at the larger task. The ranch-house was surrounded just before dawn, and the fight took place as previously described.

The invaders were alarmed at their long delay at the K. C. ranch. Hurrying away from the burning ranch-house, they pressed on toward Buffalo. Soon they found evidence that the Flaggs had spread the news of the invasion. Little groups of horsemen began appearing within rifle shot at the sides of the road. In a short time these little groups grew into an army. The invaders gave up all thought of reaching Buffalo. It was now a fight for their own lives. They turned in at the T. A. ranch, in a bend of Crazy Woman Creek, twelve miles from Buffalo. This ranch was ideal for purposes of defense, with a house and stable built of heavy logs, in which had been cut plenty of loopholes. Log breastworks were built up around the house, to strengthen the defenses. Provisions were limited to the small stock found at the ranch-house, as word was brought that the four heavily-loaded supply wagons had been captured by the "rustlers."

Jack Flagg, at the head of a party of fifty men, was one of the first on the scene. Other settlers gathered, until finally nearly four hundred heavily-armed and determined men surrounded the T. A. ranch-house and poured a steady fire into the building.

The besieged kept up a desultory return to this steady fire, but for the most part those in the ranch-house were occupied in keeping away from the points of danger. The men concerned in the invasion were all fighters and were picked for their known courage under fire, but battling against an army of this size had not entered into their calculations.

A storekeeper in Buffalo, who had a plentiful supply of arms and ammunition, threw open his place to the settlers. He invited all who did not have arms to come in and help themselves and join the fighting. But for the most part those who threw themselves into the task of driving the invading forces out of the county already were well equipped with firearms and knew how to use them.

On the sides where there were no outbuildings to provide shelter from the enemy fire, the besiegers dug trenches and from earthen breastworks kept up a steady tattoo of lead against the stout logs of the T. A. ranch-house.

It became apparent that any attempt to rush the building would result in fatalities. The besiegers were confident they could bring about the surrender of the invaders without the loss of a man, if they could only get near enough to the building to set fire to it or to batter down the door. How to accomplish this was the main question, and it was answered by a Buffalo blacksmith, Arapahoe Brown.

"Ef you fellers will pay attention to me," said 'Rap Brown, "I can show you a scheme that'll bring these fellers to their knees. What you want is a go-devil."

Then the brawny blacksmith went on to explain what he meant by a "go-devil." Soon an improvised forge was arranged, and under his direction a strange machine was constructed—something which might have done service in an assault on a castle in medieval times.

Taking the running gear of a farm wagon, 'Rap bolted a shield of sheet iron between the front wheels. This shield was tall enough to protect several men walking upright, and it came low enough to the ground to cover their feet.

"Thar," said 'Rap Brown after he had finished his piece of siege machinery. "All you hev to do is to put five or six men behind that shield and they can push the wagon right up to the cabin and set fire to the shebang, or they can get under a winder and shoot everybody in the room, if they want to. Or you can throw giant powder into the fort!"

'Rap's device was hailed with delight. It was determined to use the go-devil for the purpose of throwing powder into the house and thus forcing the surrender of the invaders. Volunteers were not called for, because everybody in the attacking force wanted to be selected.

In the meantime the outside world had been notified of the cattle war raging in Johnson County. There had been rumors of the possibility of armed conflict, so official Washington was not surprised when the news came that the livestock interests and the so-called "rustlers" had at last come to grips.

The fight had been going on two days. Another hour or two, and, with the aid of

Arapahoe Brown's strange device, no doubt the ranch-house would have been blown up and many of the invaders killed. But an official order had been sent from the War Department to Fort McKinney, near Buffalo, calling on troops to put down the "insurrection."

Just as Arapahoe Brown's go-devil had been rolled into the yard, preparatory to action, the thin, high notes of a bugle were heard in the distance.

"Boys, it's no use!" shouted the blacksmith. "The soldiers are here, and I reckon I've built this Ark of Safety for nothin'."

In a few minutes three troops of cavalry, under Colonel J. J. Van Horn, dashed into the ranch yard. Besiegers and besieged witheld their fire. Colonel Van Horn advanced to the fort and demanded the surrender of the party. There was hardly need for such a demand, however. The besieged knew that in a very short time they must either surrender or be blown to pieces. They were only too glad to give themselves up and be marched off to Fort McKinney under the protection of the flag. As they filed out of the ranch yard there was no outcry against them. The hundreds of determined small ranchmen and cowboys leaned grimly on their guns and watched in silence as the invaders disappeared up the road toward the fort.

An Idaho cowboy concealed himself in the loft of the ranchhouse and did not give himself up with the rest of the party. At night he started to walk out of the country, but took the wrong road and was picked up in Buffalo and put in jail. A man named Allen, who, it was claimed, had been going for reinforcements for the invaders, was captured and also put in jail at Buffalo.

THE little cowtown of Buffalo was in a state of ferment. Hundreds of cowmen clattered up and down the streets and gathered in excited knots on the corners. There was no attempt, however, to storm the jail and lynch the prisoners who were held there. An instance of the self-control of the settler element was shown when the prisoner, Allen, was surrendered to the military authorities, on order from the governor and from the War Department.

The commandant at the fort asked the sheriff if one troop of cavalry would be sufficient to afford protection to the prisoner, or if he should send three troops.

"If you send one troop or three, there will be trouble," came the reply. "If you send one man, I will guarantee protection."

One soldier was sent from the fort, in an open wagon, to transfer the prisoner. When he arrived he found two hundred armed men on either side of the walk leading to the court-house. The soldier got his prisoner and both men walked down this grim double line. Not a word was spoken as the prisoner was helped into the wagon and driven away by the soldier.

The settler and small ranch element made its most remarkable demonstration when the funeral of Nate Champion and Nick Ray was held. Both these men were well known. Nick Ray was a Missourian who had worked as top hand on many of the big ranches in Wyoming. Nate Champion was respected for his fearlessness. When the funeral service was held, the undertaker's room was filled with ranch women who had driven for miles to be present at the last tribute to the alleged "rustlers." When the bodies were brought out to be carried to the cemetery, there were five hundred mounted and armed men in line, prpared to follow. Silently this long procession wound through the streets of the little cowtown. There were brief services at the graves, with the grim cowpunchers gathered silently about. Then there was the same long procession, winding silently and slowly back to the town.

From open battle on the sage-covered hills of Wyoming, the great cattle war now shifted to the courts. The invasion of Johnson County had failed, largely because of the gameness of Nate Champion. If it had not been for his courageous defense of the K. C. ranch, it is a certainty that the invaders would have captured Buffalo.

The principal witnesses in the case brought against the invaders for the killing of Champion and Ray were the two trappers who were seized when they stepped out of the K. C. ranch-house that fateful morning. Jones and Walker had told what they knew of the killing, and because of this had received threats. They were told that they had best "get out of the country and keep going," but they paid no attention until Sheriff Angus informed them that he had learned of plans for their assassination. This alarmed the trappers and they consented to be put under a guard established by the sheriff. But the guard

and the trappers were plied with drink, and the witnesses were persuaded to leave the country. They were to go to a place in Nebraska, according to their affidavits, where they were to get horses and money.

Near this spot their guide led them on a long horseback journey across the Nebraska plains. Then, about midnight, he stopped and cut the telegraph wire, after which he began lighting matches, saying that he had lost the road.

The trappers, suspecting that the matches were a signal to assassins, drew revolvers which they had concealed about their persons and forced their guide to ride on with them. After riding all night they stopped at a ranch-house, and the woman there asked them if they had met a band of a dozen armed men who had stopped at her place the evening before. The trappers were certain that these were the men to whom their guide was signaling, and who were to kill them.

Later the trappers were arrested on a charge of selling liquor to Indians. They were released under bail, and, thoroughly frightened, left the country.

The invaders of Johnson County were brought to Cheyenne for trial and were kept in Keefe Hall, in lieu of a jail large enough to accommodate so many prisoners. Finally they were released, to appear at the next term of court, in January, 1893, on the representation of the sheriff that the expense of keeping the prisoners was about one hundred dollars a day and that Johnson County was bankrupt. When the cases were called for trial, the prisoners did not appear, and the charges were dropped.

ONE of the many dramatic incidents growing out of the war occurred when the prisoners were confined at Cheyenne. A brother of Nate Champion came to Cheyenne, and, entering the hall alone and unopposed, walked up and down among the men, peering into their faces, one by one. The men knew his identity at once, as he so greatly resembled his brother, the murdered Nate. In alarm, someone was sent for an officer and Champion was asked what he was doing in the hall.

"I only want to see the men who killed my brother," he said as he was led out by an officer.

After the dismissal of the cases against the invaders of Johnson County, conditions still remained unsettled on the Wyoming cattle range. The rustling went on, but the big outfits became convinced of the hopelessness of attempting to restore an unrestricted range and gradually sold off most of their holdings to smaller concerns and to individuals. In this way the great herds gradually were broken up.

A dozen cattle wars could not have stopped the rush of settlement and this inevitable absorption of the enormous herds into small holdings. It took another ten years, however, for conditions to work themselves out. In that time there were more assassinations. With the coming of sheep, there were wars over the crossing of "dead lines" drawn by cattlemen. It was not until Government authority manifested itself strongly in the control of the public range that gun law became a thing of the past.

The writer has talked with many men who were in the Johnson County cattle war. All admit that, when they look back, they cannot understand how they came to be led into such deeds of violence. But, in the heat of conflict, where each side was fighting for what it believed to be right, there was no stopping to analyze motives nor to indulge in any self-questioning. The men on both sides were used to fighting their way through life. It was their frontier training. Consequently it seemed the most natural thing to oppose force with force.

The only excuse that has ever been offered for the armed invasion of Johnson County was that it grew out of stern necessity; that there could be no reprisals against the cattle rustlers through the ordinary channels of justice, so the methods of Vigilante days were adopted. But the West had outgrown the Vigilante period, as the invaders soon found.

Although they were defeated in their plan of driving the "rustlers" out of the country by force of arms, the big cattle interests by no means gave up the fight. The instigators of the invasion won their fight in the courts, as has been shown, and were never punished. The big outfits continued to make reprisals, though there was nothing of the magnitude of the invasion of Johnson County. When the last shot had been fired in the battle at the T. A. ranch, the final war for the open range had ended.

It was a fight as hopeless from the start as the struggle of the Indians to stem the tides of emigration from their buffalo

ranges. Like that, too, now that one looks back on it, there was something of pathos in the struggle. The men who had built up the cattle busines in the West, who had trailed the first great herds from Texas and established the first settlements in Wyoming, were of the finest pioneer stock. They had brought the law to frontier communities, where previously there had been no law. Their fortunes were invested in their herds, and those herds were dependent upon a wide range and unfenced trails to the streams and water-holes. When the nester came, and the rustler with him, these men saw their fortunes crumbling. They organized and fought a long, hard and bitter fight. One must respect their courage, though, in the light of history, their wisdom may be questioned.

The Johnson County cattle war was the Gettysburg of the big cattle interests. When that fight was lost, it meant the gradual breaking up of the great ranches and the disintegration of the immense herds that had dotted Wyoming's hills and mesas. The baronial system, with all its splendor of romance, and with all it had accomplished in pioneer achievement, failed on its own chosen battleground in Northern Wyoming. The nesters, who swarmed out of their little shacks and log cabins to beat back the invaders, were, all unconsciously, representatives of that tremendous economic force which has brought about the settlement of the West even in its remotest sections. To battle against such a force was manifestly impossible, and that is why the Johnson County cattle war was lost to the great livestock interests almost before it started.

THE SHIP THAT NEVER CAME BACK

NEWEETEE harbor, on the southeastern coast of Vancouver Island, was the scene of one of the most dramatic and tragic episodes connected with the pioneering of the Northwest. For it was there that the trading schooner *Tonquin*, with her crew of twenty-four men, was captured by Indians. All but one of the crew met death.

The *Tonquin* was shipped around the Horn knocked down, and was put together at Astoria, in the spring of 1811 by a party of Hudson's Bay Company traders. In the summer of that year she dropped anchor at Neweetee harbor, where there was a sizeable Indian camp.

The Indians paddled out to the ship in canoes, bringing their pelts with them, but their chief, Nookamis, persuaded by rival traders that the Hudson's Bay Company had been cheating his people, engaged in an altercation with Captain Thorn, who ended the dispute by kicking the chief overboard. The Indians immediately left the ship.

The next forenoon the Indians began to board the *Tonquin* by the canoe load until there were more than a hundred red men aboard. The *Tonquin's* crew began to get uneasy, but Captain Thorn reassured them. His men were heavily armed and the Indians had nothing except knives. Some of the crew noted that all the Indians who had not a knife or hatchet were trading pelts for these articles. Again they warned the captain, who paid little heed.

Suddenly another dispute broke out and Captain Thorn ordered the Indians from the ship. Immediately the war-cry went up and the Indians fell upon the crew with knives and hatchets, led by Wicananish, a sub-chief and son of Nookamis.

A dozen Indians rushed Captain Thorn. He felled a half dozen or more before he finally fell, mortally wounded. Lewis, the ship's clerk, dived down a hatchway, but was caught in midair by a hatchet hurled by a howling brave. Badly wounded, Lewis made his way to a cabin, where he found four of his shipmates. They barricaded the door and held off the red men, succeeding finally in clearing the ship. All hands had been dispatched excepting a breed interpreter, who had been taken prisoner to the Indian camp.

That night, Lewis' four companions quit the ship in a rowboat under cover of darkness and got clear of the harbor, but were blown ashore a few miles down the coast, where they hid out in a cave. There the Indians found them next morning and dragged them back to their camp. There they were tortured and put to death.

Lewis escaped a similar fate because he was too badly wounded to leave the ship. With his life slowly ebbing, Lewis laid low all night and the next morning watched the Indians put out in their canoes and circle the ship. Persuaded, evidently, that no one aboard was alive, they finally drew alongside and clambered aboard, bent on plunder. But they reckoned without the dying Lewis.

More than one hundred Indians were aboard when without warning there was a terrific explosion and the ship and all aboard were blown to fragments. Lewis had fired the ship's magazine, going to his death along with the rest.—A. H. R.

THE FIGHTING PRIEST

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

Mokura, the wrestler, scoffed and sneered at the gods, and the fickle crowd scoffed with him. In this little Japanese village Kagamo, the abbot, and Rogers, the missionary, faced a desperate situation—and fought fire with fire

THE village of Okinawa should have been astir with devotees. The huge bronze Jizo, god of travelers, awaited them on his pedestal in the Shinto temple's courtyard; acolytes were ready to direct the way to the priests, who in turn were prepared to take them swiftly to the nearest money-coffer. But the copper receptacles had yet to feel the comforting clack of a single coin.

Snow lay six inches deep. Every stunted pine blossomed in white. Plum and cherry were as falsely adorned. The very pools could not be told from the hard ground about. Water from the Three Apes' mouths had frozen in the fountain's last attempt at spurting, and left the animals bearded. A deserted bird's nest made a white chalice filled with frozen nectar.

Inside the temple, in the abbot's room, the diffused light through the paper panels grew dimmer and dimmer, the charcoal in the volcano-like pit in the floor brighter, until the old abbot's face was illumined by ruddy shadowy gleams. A boy shouted across the court, hurrying the chilled priests to assembly. Footsteps. The evening bell boomed four times, each fourth ring of the bell echoed by a reverberant grumbling of a softer bell within the temple.

The abbot coughed, and looked at his companion.

"I should be praying," he said, "but that can wait. It is as I feared. As I told you. If every promise of payment to the temple had been fulfilled, I believe that I might make the pilgrimage to Isé I have so often spoken of! Well, at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that I was correct. That is something. But coppers in the box would have been far better. I almost wish"—glancing slyly at his companion—"I almost wish that rich people across the sea sent me money, as they do you!"

Arthur Rogers, the Okinawa missionary, looked at the abbot and grinned. He had been in Japan for two years, but was new to this village. Kagamo, the abbot, liked him; he knew, also, that something was worrying the old Japanese, and that the other would speak of it when he was ready.

"You wouldn't like it so well if you had to account for every penny of it," he retorted. "Especially when there is not enough for even the necessary things."

"It seems to me," Kagamo said, in a low voice, "that the gods who place us where we are as priests should see that we have money enough to maintain that exalted position. Must my boys always wear cast-

off shoes from the village? *Geta* with holes as large as the coins we did not get this day? I grow sick of it, Rogers-*san!* I grow sick of it. I—" He clapped his hands, and sat silent.

An acolyte brought the evening meal: four thin soups, rice seasoned by giant radish scraped, hard black beans.

The abbot ate rapidly, and became more hopeful.

"At least we have sufficient to eat," he said, smiling. "Such as it is. There are slim days before us, Rogers-*san*. No money today. A great festival day, and no money; what can we expect after that?" The abbot cleaned the last black bean from his bowl, and with sudden petulance flung the porcelain to the floor.

"That is the way with our plans," he announced angrily. "We make them, and they break like that dish."

"What are you going to do about it?" Rogers asked cautiously. Kagamo had sent for him, but had not mentioned the reason, and Rogers was utterly at sea.

"I? What am *I* going to do about it? I! I! Always I! What are *you* going to do about it?"

Rogers did not answer. He wanted, naturally, to ask about what, since he did not know, but felt that the abbot believed he should understand, and so said nothing.

"Of course I must do it," the abbot went on mournfully. "I do not even get advice, which is the nearest I ever seem to come to assistance. Tell me," he said explosively, "how many men and women came to your temple—your church—in the last few weeks?"

So Kagamo had brought him here to gloat, Rogers thought, and discarded the notion instantly; that was out of keeping with the old priest's earnest friendliness. Truly, he had lost the converts that his predecessors had striven to obtain; how, he did not know. They had simply filtered away. Yet Rogers had been sent to Okinawa because of good work in the past. He had made friends rapidly, with the priests, with the townspeople, with the children, even, who admired his long, powerful body. And, as Kagamo said, the last week or so had seen all of the ground gained vanished—why, he did not know.

"I will tell you!" Kagamo shouted. "None have come. None! And it is the same with us. Now, what are we to do? We? I mean what am *I* to do? In the old days it would have been a simple matter. A dim street, a sword, and *ping!* His head would have hit the basket, or the ground, for all I would have cared. Now it is different. Come with me, my son, and I will show you the only possible solution, and tell the story as we watch."

"Whose head?" Rogers asked.

"*Mah!*" Kagamo snorted. He did not answer further than that, but led the way through the cold corridors.

THE principal room was but little brighter than the zigzag hall, and in it priests seemed to make their way about a sanctuary of shadows where darkness trembled with the drone of their prayers. The immense chamber flickered with candle-light, of little use save to make shadows. The altar, which stood in the middle, was being moved away as Kagamo and his white companion entered, and the gilt upon the lacquer was like another candle flame in the dimness. Priests deposited the altar somewhere in the gloom, and took their places in the long line of their brothers, all sitting hunched on their knees, all silent in the presence of their abbot.

Kagamo moved a little forward.

The priests broke into prayer, muffled, out of which the abbot's assurance came, short and absolute. Then: "The prayers must wait!" he said briefly. "Unless something is done, we all starve before the winter is over. Why? You all know. Because a man-mountain, a mass of flesh, a human ape, a—a—" He sputtered, and broke out into cursing.

"After that, this wrestler will never be able to fight!" a very young priest whispered, but not so softly that Kagamo did not hear him.

The old abbot's lips writhed, words were ready to tumble forth; Rogers actually heard him mutter something about the faith of the innocent, but when he spoke again it was in monotonous tone.

"In the festival season," Kagamo went on evenly, "there is little money to be made by traveling wrestling-troupes. And so this ape, this Mohara, as he is named, must blaspheme our gods, and the Buddhist gods, and Rogers-*san's* into the bargain! He tells us that he is greater! That we, the priests, may pray as long as we like, but if we step on his platform he will throw us off as easily as if we had never prayed for victory at all! So, I say this: we have no time for prayers. What we want is one of us big enough and strong

enough to take this boaster and break him in a hundred pieces!"

The priests rumbled approval.

"Good!" Kagamo said sleekly. "I am glad that you agree. Now! Much meat has gone into you, my children. Let us see if it has been wasted. You, Kashi, have been laboring in the garden. Your muscles are like iron. I saw you lift a tub filled with rock for the path. Stand up. Let me think: who has been threshing rice? You, there—you will do. Come to me, both of you. I am old, but I know how wrestling is done, together with a few tricks not generally used. Out of one of you I will make a buffer against this Mohara devil, for inspired by devils he must be. Strip, both of you."

He turned to Rogers and asked, "What do you think of my plan?"

"The only one which will impress the villagers," Rogers said shortly. "If it works."

"It must work," Kagamo grunted.

He ran his hands over Koshi's shoulder muscles when the two men stood ready.

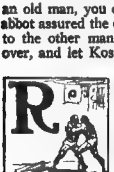
"By the thorns of Jizo, Koshi, I believe you will throw him! This Mohara is soft with easy living, my son. He comes into the little towns like Okinawa, where there are no wrestlers. In Tokyo or Osaka he would not last through the hour of the Hare! *Mah!* Look closely, Kashi. Here is a trick that I learned."

The abbot stripped off his robes, and, scrawny as a starved rat, stood up against the other's bulk.

"Do not throw me, Koshi. That would be easy. But—look—arm to arm, so—head up—move your elbow—now—keep your feet!"

Despite the gardener's huge bulk he was pushed back, lifted partially from his feet. The priests gasped in awe.

"If I can do that with no strength, I, an old man, you can do it far better," the abbot assured the chagrined Koshi. "Now," to the other man he had selected, "come over, and let Koshi practice that on you."



ROGERS watched the naked figures in the dim room. The barbaric moving of taut muscles, the smell of sweating flesh, the grunts of the wrestlers, exhilarated him, and he breathed as heavily as the laboring men. It seemed an impossible scene. The tugging, panting naked men in the great prayer-room, with its carved walls, its niches holding every god from Kaminari, god of thunder, to the placid Amatsu, the star-god, whose single jewel-eye reflected the candles in pinpoint light.

It gave him strange thoughts. Thoughts of bodily combat. Once he put a hand on his own arm-muscles, and wondered if they were in the condition they used to be. It was, indeed, a long time since he'd left college. How would he stand up under that grip of Koshi's?

To shake this out of his head he fastened his eyes on an ancient painting, straining to see it exactly: little islands rising sheer from a sea bristling with waves, fantastic, abrupt shores like savage tusks; everywhere pine-trees clinging, convulsed as maniacs, thrusting out weird branches close to the painted water, as if exchanging tragic confidences. All harsh.

His eyes came back to the grappling figures. He watched the sinuous wriggling of Koshi's forearm as his fingers slid into position, the resultant giving-way of the opponent.

"Perfect!" he whispered to Kagamo.

"Possibly," the abbot admitted. "That is one trick. Now, Koshi, we are going to try more."

Rogers wondered, with an inward chuckle, what his people at home, the supporters of the missions, would have thought of him had they seen him now: watching two immense Japanese learning wrestling holds from their abbot, and the sum of the exertion bringing back worshippers who had begun to bow before a false god. Yet it wasn't so very different from—from lots of things. Didn't many wrestle with the devil? Of course they did. Wasn't the priest Koshi going to do that very thing, and for the same purpose?

The whole affair took a different color after that. Rogers' interest became keener; here, he told himself, was the eternal conflict of good and evil, with the ancient, latakia-hued Kagamo playing the first part. He wished, with that, he could tell Koshi some Western holds; if it were boxing he could have. He wanted to help, to do more than simply sit and watch. Someone else was going to fight his fight.

"Remember this," Kagamo commanded harshly. "What you do—these tricks I have taught you—must be done at once. Immediately. Is that understood, Koshi? Otherwise this Mohara will push you out of the ring like you push a barrow, or lift you and throw you out of the entire place. If the first trick fails, use the second. If

that does not work, then the third. He will never know them all. But you must act quickly. I need not tell you that when he comes off his feet do not be gentle about dropping him. *Yoh!* We will all be helping you when you throw him." The old face became malignant. "Squash him on the floor like an overripe peach, so that the juice runs out!"

He glanced around, and saw Rogers' face.

"And give him an extra squeeze for our white priest, Rogers-*san*," he added slyly.

"I would like to squeeze him myself," Rogers said, laughing.

"If it were a fight in your own country I would let you," Kagamo assured him. "But our wrestling is different. It takes a fat man, and you are lean. There are reasons why we should do this thing ourselves—not to injure you and your work; never that, for we are friends. But it is our trouble mainly, and hence our fight."

"I'd like a—a—" Rogers stumbled, grinned. What he had tried to say was that he would have liked to take a poke at Mohara's jaw, but he could not find the words to make it sound sensible in Japanese.

"We all would," Kagamo retorted, sensing the white man's thought. "Come, Koshi. Try them all again."

One by one the priests lost interest, and the great chamber emptied, until only the two wrestlers, Kagamo, and Rogers remained. Long into the night the abbot worked with Koshi, until the gardener-priest had the three holds letter-perfect, until he was able to make his bull-like rush and clamp his fingers upon the other's upper arm with absolute precision. At last Kagamo was satisfied.

"Sleep well," he told Koshi. "In the early morning there will be much food for you. Do not arise for the prayer-hours. I will do your praying for you. Sleep until you are called. You have done well."

When the two were alone, the abbot clamped a hand on Rogers arm.

"He is slow in the head, our Koshi. But he knows what I have taught him, and, since he does no thinking for himself, will do it exactly. If it works, we will have the laugh on this Mohara, and will make the villagers pay well for their transgression. If it does not work—then—but it must work. If Koshi will only do as he was taught." He scratched his lean face, then whispered slowly, "Were I but young again!"

"He will not forget them," Rogers assured the abbot. "I do not know very much about Japanese wrestling, but I could perform these holds myself."

"That is not the same thing. You are a man of brains, while Koshi is but two hundred pounds of flesh. Did you see how he acted? He did what I told him well enough, but took no interest in the doing. He is a child, for all his size and years. But he is the best we have. I only hope that Mohara is the second-rate fellow I believe he is. But *he* has brains! I dislike thinking of the money he makes, money that should come to us. He makes of us all fools. You and I as well! I would like to have the dropping of him, Rogers-*san*, if I could but lift him from the floor!"

"And I!" Rogers echoed.

"I believe you would," Kagamo said, smiling. "You are not like the *seiyo-jin* priest who was here before you, Rogers-*san*. If a ragged urchin threw a stone at him, he smiled and shook his finger chidingly. If a crazy mendicant cursed him, he blessed the idiot by way of payment. He was little and fat, where you are long and thin. For all your length, I do not believe you are very weak, Rogers-*san*. I like a man who will fight for what he considers right—as we do now."

"I would like a chance at this wrestler," Rogers told the other.

"It is the spirit that counts, brother," Kagamo agreed. "I, also. But I am too old, and you too lean. When the time comes, we will leave our handicaps behind; that has all been said before, doubtless, and by more learned men. But the rice-wine in my room has never been drunk—not by ordinary men, at all events. There—you do not drink. I had forgotten. Ho—but I talk too much! It is that I wish to forget tomorrow, until it is actually upon us. Sit with an old man, my son, and cheer him."

They walked back along the cotridor in silence, until Kagamo muttered, "I would have liked to have had this Mohara between my hands—forty years ago!"

BANNERS of white linen printed in blue and scarlet characters flashed from bamboo poles inclined on either side of the single long street of Kinawa, announcing the performance of the great and noble Mohara and his troupe. The snow beneath it was trodden gray by villagers who had visited the bare plat-

form, as if was about to be blackened by the feet of the oncoming crowd. Tall tents, covered with rough paintings of wrestlers, stood just behind the platform erected for the bouts.

As the crowd neared the platform they passed beneath a sacred gate—*torii*—and shouts of laughter rose, started by some remark.

Soon a squatting mass of villagers surrounded the platform, eating rice and pickles and tea, drinking flat beer, uniced, smoking cigarettes. They chattered gaily, enthralled by the prospect of physical contact vicariously; as priests began to sift among them their voices raised in jibes. Hoa but this Mohara was more powerful than any dozen gods! They had been foolish to put money before an old and foolish abbot these many years! Of what avail bringing offerings, when the temple gods could not do so simple a thing as defeating a mere man like Mohara! And, for that matter, when all had brought money that an offering be made for rain, did it rain? Did it? Let the priests answer that one!

When Kagamo, in his black silk robes, stepped among them, Rogers by his side, the voices stilled, and did not become loud again until the umpire hopped to the platform. Wrestlers crowded up after him, their broad, bestial faces appearing the crueler, the more strangely feminine, for the long hair drawn to a bunch on the top of their heads, like the pommel on a Mexican saddle. They were as naked as the umpire was over-dressed, as large as he was slender and small. They formed a circle around the platform, locked arms over each other's shoulders, and stamped counter-clockwise about the floor; releasing the clasped shoulders, each man shed the bright ceremonial apron, and all but two, and the umpire, jumped off the platform to the ground.

The umpire fiddled a hand into one of his long, loose sleeves, and brought out a thin hair rope. This he arranged in a crude circle on the floor of the platform, fastening it at irregular intervals with small nails, which he brought out from a pouch hanging to his belt. He then found his fan, also in his sleeve, snapped it open, and turned to the expectant audience.

"Remember that the old and honorable rules are used!" he bellowed. "When either wrestler's body touches the floor he is defeated. If he is pushed beyond the circle, so much as a portion of his heel, he is defeated." He bowed to them, and finally to the two wrestlers who had remained on the platform.

These two rubbed salt on their palms, rinsed their mouths to be pure in event of death, and then threw salt over their right shoulders to ward off evil spirits.

To himself Kagamo muttered, "These believe in devils, if not in gods."

Rogers, hearing, nodded.

The giants stepped to opposite corners, brought a leg forward with a stamp, at the same time slapping their thighs with tremendous force. They crouched, spread their legs wide, faced each other squarely, the right hand closed in a fist and extended downward, almost touching the ground. They glared fiercely, awaiting the umpire's word and fan-movement.

Rogers started as the fan was waved, expecting to see them spring at each other's throats. He had never seen a wrestling-match before; in the large town where he had been stationed before coming to Okinawa there were too many whites who would have frowned. Seeing no advantage to be gained, the Japanese watched steadily, then gripped so suddenly that Rogers rose from his kneeling position.

The umpire danced about them, yelping them on; they moved with an alacrity Rogers could hardly credit, seeing their ponderous weight. They shuffled and pulled and slapped, gripping the girdle around the loins finally with iron tenacity. One made a false step, and was shoved out of the circle.

Two others came on.

They glared, pounced, clinched. Muscles creaked. Feet padded on the wooden floor. One girdle slipped; the umpire called time. It must be adjusted. But the man who held the advantage refused with a shake of the head, as is allowed; to have relinquished his grip would have been to lose all. He had doubled his arms round those of his opponent, and now brought his fists together in the man's face. The umpire then adjusted the girdle as they panted in that position; Rogers could see the whole energy of the fellow who held the advantage concentrated in a grip that would have broken an ordinary man's arms. Gradually he worked his opponent toward the edge of the circle; the other yielded outward, overbalanced his conqueror, and both stumbled head foremost, locked, from the ring.

A tie, the umpire decreed.

The crowd thought differently. A second of silence, and then arose a murmur full of menace. Bottles began to fly. Not

that any of the Japanese had wagered money on the result, nor that they cared who actually won. But had they not paid their money to see, and were they not to be considered?

"It was poorly decided, by the head of the Sacred Cock!" Kagamo agreed with the majority.

BEHIND a tent-curtain, fifty feet distant, Mohara, the wrestler, grinned as he saw their mounting temper. He adjusted his fringed girdle carefully, grinned again, and walked toward the platform. A path opened for him, and he leaped ponderously to the platform.

"I, Mohara, shall umpire the last fight, and then we see who will wrestle with me!" he howled, and the crowd brayed with him.

Face to face, the last pair bent on their shins, made their joints crack, slapped their thighs resoundingly; they were completely naked, as the others, save for a wide sash of black silk which encircled their loins, its long fringes falling over their thighs gracefully. They pressed their palms in salt, drying the sweat against the ground crystals. These were the two best; to make the bout exciting Mohara had promised two yen to the victor. The strain of their vigilance made sweat break out over their bodies, and Rogers, watching, felt his own skin become moist.

"They are not so bad," Kagamo whispered thoughtfully, "and Mohara must be even better."

Rogers glanced warily at Mohara. He was an enormous man, with a great swollen belly, yet giving the impression of superhuman strength.

As he was watching, the wrestlers hurled themselves forward, their hands gliding over their shining skins; from wrist to elbow to shoulder, at last seizing the girdle with terrible grip. They stood so, not moving.

"Fair," Kagamo said grudgingly. "See, Rogers-*san*: they are sensitive to every momentary relaxation of muscle in their opponent, and profit by it to hurl the other to his back, or push him beyond the boundary. See their feet! They seem riveted to the floor—there he goes!"

One of the wrestlers was thrown heavily to the floor.

Kagamo breathed deeply.

"I am glad that I told Koshi to wait where he could not see," he admitted. "Now we will not have longer to wait. There! The paunched ape is getting ready."

Mohara had thrown off his ceremonial apron and taken a place in the very middle of the platform.

He twitched his muscles, and Rogers was certain he had never seen a more brutally powerful man. The fellow was nearly six feet tall, broad as an ox, but with a small head, with the incongruous top-knot making him look still more the pagan, the beast.

"Your priests have said that to kill a rooster is to bring immediate death," Mohara said loudly. "Bring me that rooster!"

It was brought him by one of his troupe. The wrestler took it by the neck, whirled it once in the air, and let it drop.

"Well," he said, smiling broadly. "I am not dead yet."

The crowd, frightened at first, laughed loudly.

"In the old days, when there were few male birds, they would have eaten them in times of famine," Kagamo muttered to Rogers. "Therefore that edict, which was never revoked. The fellow is no fool, Rogers-*san*."

It was growing cold, and the watching Japanese often cupped a cigarette to warm their chilled fingers. The sky was overcast, and growing grayer.

"Am I dead?" Mohara repeated. "Not I. I am live enough to eat a few priests, salted, for my dinner. Or I might use that old one"—bowing to Kagamo—"for a pot of soup. He has little enough meat for any other purpose!"

"I must try what I can, first," Kagamo said to Rogers, and stood up.

"It is not well to blaspheme the gods," he said to Mohara mildly.

"Gods? What gods?"

"There are a good many," Kagamo said smoothly. "Not to mention various demons, who do such things as pulling out a man's eyes while he sleeps. Against such your strength avails little, Mohara-*san*. It is not well to trouble them."

"Have you ever seen a god?" Mohara shouted.

"He has me there," Rogers heard the old abbot mutter. Then the old man answered firmly. "Yes. Of course."

"Have you ever seen the Jizo you worship here?"

"Many times!"

"He protects you of the temple?"

Kagamo nodded.

The wrestler smiled softly. Gathering his spittle in his mouth he bent toward the abbot, and spat.

"Call on him to wipe that away!" he jeered. "Or to avenge himself upon me for the insult."

Kagamo wiped his face.

"I will," he promised, evenly, although his old frame shook. "Koshi, my son!"

The white man, Rogers, was more openly angered than Kagamo. His hands clenched, but he remained as he was, kneeling. It came to him that Koshi, who had seemed so large, so brawny, so well-muscled, was a child beside Mohara; the gardener-priest seemed sleepy, and little interested in the affair. Mohara watched him alertly.

"Koshi's very sluggishness is protection," Kagamo said. "He has not sense enough to be afraid. If he will but do as I told him, as quickly as I told him he must, we will laugh at this Mohara yet. It appears to me that this is a time to pray, Rogers-*san*. O Jizo, if you will lay this Mohara on his back, I will make these priests of mine say more prayers than there remains time for them to say them in! Koshi! Koshi, my son; do not forget! I do not dare tell him to be fast, or Mohara will know what is in the wind."

Koshi followed his instructions, stepped up on the platform as calmly as if going to morning rice, with his eyes on Mohara. Kagamo had been positive in his directions: Koshi was to come when called, go directly to the platform, stand where he had mounted until directed to a corner, then rush at Mohara the instant the word was given. At no time was he to take his eyes off the other. Koshi was doing as he had been ordered.

The audience divided into two parts now. About Kagamo had assembled the priests, shouting, "Koshi! Koshi!" and making up in unison what they missed by numbers. Gradually the villagers began to organize their shouting, and soon the name of their new hero, Mohara, was all that could be heard.

Rogers caught himself breathing a prayer that this mountain of muscle might be overthrown. Kagamo reached over and grasped Rogers' hand in his own thin fingers; they panted together, the abbot's breath whistling through his nose.

"If it were but my brain in Koshi's body," the abbot mourned. "But I have given him my thoughts. *Hai!* The umpire directs them to their places; he waves his fan. They are ready. Remember, Koshi!" he shrieked, his voice impotent in the cries of the onlookers.

With his next words Rogers caught a new angle of the gravity of the situation.

"If we lose," Kagamo said harshly, "I will no longer be an abbot. Such procedure as a priest wrestling is not permitted. I am too old to be transplanted. If we win—all is excused to one who wins. Koshi, Koshi, Koshi——"

WITH the drop of the umpire's fan Koshi rushed forward. Rogers saw the two meet, saw Koshi's hands squirm upward, and, instead of continuing in the reach for the girdle, encircle and stop at the other's elbows; he saw Koshi's back muscles writhe into snakey ridges, heard the gasp of breath, the movement as Mohara attempted to free himself, heard a soft snap.

"It works! It works!" Kagamo screamed, beside himself. "The arm has broken, for the fellow fought back. Gods in heaven, what have we now?"

They had plenty, it seemed, and too much for Koshi. The giant Mohara, unmindful of the snapped forearm, had whirled the priest up from the floor, and, with a bull-ape bellow, smashed him down to it again. The priest's head hit before his body.

Rogers sickened as the stain beside the priest grew and became more than a discoloration on the floor. A pool; a widening red pool.

"Cracked like a nut in a god's fingers!" Kagamo whimpered. "And my fault. Koshi did as he was told. Did I know he faced something inhuman? An animal? A devil? My soul is heavy this day. Poor simple Koshi!"

Inhumanity, also, seemed to peer out of the faces of the villagers, flaring bright as Mohara waved his broken arm aloft.

"What is an arm?" he yelled. "Mohara cares nothing. It does not hurt. Tomorrow it will be well. Are there any more priestlings that will come up here with me?"

The priests huddled about Kagamo, silent.

"You, old one, how about you? Are you very saintly? You know very powerful prayers? Will any of them, or all of them, throw me? You should be strong, after all the food you have taken from

these poor people! And I—I have but one arm now. Surely a prayer or two will defeat a man with but one arm? Or a little incense? Burn some, old frog, and then come up to me!"

Kagamo gathered his old, fragile body, dropped his robe from him, and stumbled forward.

"I sent Koshi," those near heard him say. "What more can I do than go forward with his soul and plead for him?" Then, loudly, he called, "I am coming, hog-belly!"

Rogers reached out a hand, and then, from the look on the old abbot's face, withdrew it.

The umpire giggled nervously as he waved his fan. Kagamo was very serious; possibly, the priests decided, he knew some terrible trick that would down the awful Mohara. Kagamo had no such hope. He knew that any trick of his was useless against the other's animal-like immunity from pain.

Rogers realized that the old man considered it in the light of a sacrifice; that nothing would stop him from going. How he'd like to lick that accursed sneering murderer! With the same breath he knew it was impossible. He knew nothing of Japanese wrestling, although his lean frame ached to stand up to the Japanese.

The wrestlers who had completed their fights were covered with padded silk coats now; the air grew steadily colder.

Kagamo went through no motions. No salt on his palms, no water to his mouth.

"If I die, I die pure!" he hurled at a questioner. "I have not sinned."

Mohara was laughing as Kagamo came at him; laughing, he picked the abbot up, and held him high.

"Who wants this priest?" he shouted. "Who wants the holy man of the Okinawa temple?" With his free hand he tweaked Kagamo's nose. "Who wants this prayer of prayers, this taker of poor folks' money? Ho, but I have freed you from a bloodsucker, who poses as a servant of the gods. Where are his gods, I ask?" He tweaked Kagamo's nose again. "Well, who wants him?"

He paused. The air was so still that the crowd could hear the slap of fish to the hot pans, as a stall-keeper prepared for the hungry throng.

"Who wants him? No one? Then I must throw him away!"

A priest muttered something, and Mohara looked at him keenly.

"Did I hear an offer? I do not wrestle with the aged. If some young priest desires his abbot, let him wrestle me for him. Otherwise I must throw him away, having no use for him."

He made a motion to toss Kagamo over their heads, to the ice-hard ground beyond. All knew what such a toss would mean for the old man.

"I want him!"

Rogers was astonished at the creaking sound of his own voice. Something had driven him to stand, driven him to shout the words; this deserted him, the moment the sentence was out, and left him standing, a-tremble, frightened at the certain result of what he had said.

Mohara blinked.

"Who is this white worm?" he asked.

They told him, all together.

"If he is a priest, as you say, I must give him his wish. Ho! He is trembling like melting ice-cream!"

Rogers made a noise in his throat, intended as defiance and sounding like a quack.

Mohara was quick to catch it.

"Ducky, ducky, ducky," he mocked, and the crowd took it up.

Rogers saw Kagamo motioning him down, but paid no attention. He, a white missionary, would not stand back where the old abbot had gone ahead; there were too many missionaries who stood back. He was not afraid of Mohara. Why should he be? The fellow was only a man; he, Rogers, was a man as well.

He tore his coat from the grasp of a nearby priest, and bowled a path for himself to the platform.

Something of the whispers of the audience reached Mohara and impressed him. *Seiyo-jin* gods were nothing to fool with! Mohara had better be careful, especially when one of the white priests fought, for they always said that one should love his fellow—as if that were possible! But, best of all, here was a match possibly worth beholding, and not included in the price. What a tale it would make!

Rogers stood dumbly as one of the wrestling troupe stripped him of his clothes and bound a silken girdle about his middle. It was cold, and involuntarily he shivered.

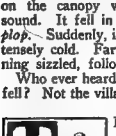
Mohara dropped Kagamo none too gently to the floor, knocking his breath from him, and, with a backward movement of his foot, pushed the abbot off the platform. He stepped to a corner, watching Rogers closely. Was there anything to fear from this scrawny white man? Look

at him shiver! Yet, could there be anything to what the crowd said, of the terrible foreign gods? Possibly this one, also, knew some strange tricks. With his other arm gone, Mohara would be easy prey for the first who went for him. Mohara decided he would be cautious, would use all his skill.

The crowd moved close to the platform, and it was ringed with eyes.

A sifting snow began to fall, dropping on the canopy with an almost audible sound. It fell in great flakes: *plop-plop-plop*. Suddenly, it seemed, the air was intensely cold. Far distant, a jag of lightning sizzled, followed by no rumble.

Who ever heard of lightning when snow fell? Not the villagers, surely.



THE umpire waved his fan, and Japanese and white man came together. To Rogers there was the barest second of contact, and then he was thrown from the circle. Thrown so swiftly that Mohara had not time to put force into it.

The Japanese was astonished at the quickness with which the *seiyo-jin* priest hopped to his feet and stood waiting for the umpire again.

"Ho!" he grimaced. "Next time we will keep you longer on the floor!" That the white man desired more showed Mohara one thing: the other knew nothing of wrestling, for one fall is sufficient for each bout. He turned to the umpire.

"Explain to this thin white worm that if he is out of the circle he is defeated and that any action save those of the arms is forbidden. No, let him try it again, since he wants. Hai! if I let him he would kick me!" he threw as an afterthought to the crowd.

The fan again; this time Rogers stuck closely to the other, and attempted to push Mohara near the circle's edge. Rogers was not soft, nor was he weak, yet in the arms of the giant wrestler he might have been both. He buried his face in the other's shoulder, nauseated by the smell of the sweaty skin, braced his legs, put all his strength into one effort to bend Mohara back.

At the height of his effort he knew that Mohara was laughing.

He called upon hidden forces; Mohara laughed the louder.

Suddenly the Japanese, with a guffaw, picked the white man from his feet, and threw him as he had hurled Koshi, the gardener-priest. In the split-second of flight through the air Rogers was able to twist his lean, supple body; he fell, heavily, but not on his head.

The grinning faces of the audience swam round and round, became ellipses of brown, out of which gigantic sparks glared at him. They moved faster and faster, were gone for an instant in blackness; dimly, he heard Mohara say something, heard Kagamo snarl an answer, heard roars of laughter faintly, like wind in the reeds.

Then he saw the faces again; they reeled and danced, but he knew them for what they were. He raised a hand to his face, and brought it down warm and wet. Slowly he rose to one knee; it supported him none too well. Why wouldn't the confounded thing stand still and steady for him. His eyes found Mohara's, and stayed there.

"Lie down; lie down," he heard Kagamo say softly. "You have done your part."

Blood trickled into his mouth, and he spat it out. He wished that it were not so dark. Why didn't his knees hold him? Where was Mohara, anyhow?

The darkness was actual; the snow was falling thickly, and seemed to be gray fleece.

The white missionary got to his feet. He remembered nothing of the rules of wrestling now. His head whirled and ached and buzzed. What he wanted was to get close to Mohara. Just once.

"Come back! Come back!" Kagamo shrieked. "Come back, or we will be saying the Thousand Words of Perfume over your body!"

Rogers did not feel the whip of a new wind on his bare body. He was as unaware of the outlandish girdle about his middle as he was of the whole weird scene. Slowly, with infinite pain, he neared the bulk of the huge wrestler.

Yet to those near the platform he was no object of pity, and, indeed, a hiss of warning went up to Mohara. The *seiyo-jin* was a horrible sight; blood ran from his nose, and made a crooked river down his white chest. It was not that, but the expression on his face, that worried Mohara. He had defeated this foreign priest once. He had thrown him, enough to kill an ordinary man, once; here was this bloody thing coming back. What must he do to rid himself of this apparition? *Hai!* When a man was thrashed, he was thrashed. Did not this fool know that?

Rogers' eyes alone were steady. His arms and legs trembled, his whole body swayed; yet he came on. The lips, which had preached of gentleness to the villagers, were snarling.

It came to an old man in the audience that Rogers-*san* was dead and this was his avenging ghost; no sooner did the thought strike this one than the audience was the less by one Japanese.

Rogers took two more steps, and was now face to face with Mohara. The Japanese took a great breath, reached out his arms to crush the slender body completely. There would be no doubt this time.

Then three things happened, so fast, so close together that none could determine them apart.

Rogers' right arm, directed by every particle of his brain, shot out, and took Mohara in the pit of his great, swollen paunch, sank deep; a quick flicker of blue flame jagged over the platform, thunder came instantly, pealing, crackling, roaring ruin, fading as rapidly to a dull, low grumble; something crowed like a rooster. All three, all at the same moment.

The blinding flash was short, and when it was gone all was dimmer than before, yet all about the platform could see that the white priest, the *seiyo-pin*, stood erect, while Mohara lay on the boards!

Every member of the audience could have sworn—and did, after—that Rogers-*san* had not touched Mohara; they had seen the two come close together, and then the whole became an affair of the gods. You might argue all day and half of the night, but that did not take away the cock's crow!

They knew now what that distant lightning—unheard of at this time of year—had meant. None stopped for discussion. Who knew what might happen next? It was a time to seek the temple, and lay what coins remained in the copper boxes! And pray—or get the priests to do it, which was even better. In moments the space about the platform was emptied.

Kagamo climbed slowly to the platform. Mohara still lay at full length. The others of the troupe were on the way to the temple with the villagers. The abbot prodded the fallen wrestler with a foot. Mohara glared at him, attempted to rise, tried to speak and say that he had been struck, and that hitting was against the rules.

"If you cannot speak, I can," Kagamo snapped. "Take care with whom you play next time, blasphemer!"

He placed an arm about Rogers and led the half-dazed missionary from the platform. At the very edge he stopped, and scratched his skinny jaw thoughtfully. He turned, and called back to the wild-eyed Mohara:

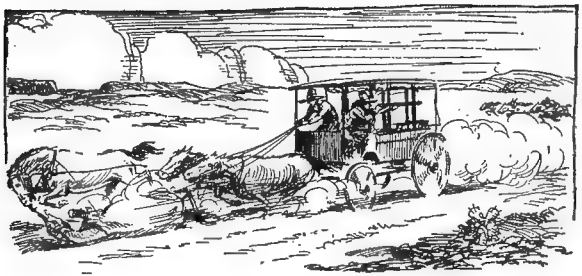
"It is not well to anger the gods by killing their sacred birds, Mohara. Nor is it wise to crow too soon! The wise man"—he grinned widely—"the wise man crows at the decisive moment, my son!"

THE BAREFOOTED CART

WHEN Pierre Laclede, pioneer, explorer, and good all-around business man, traveled to the frontier which is now the city of St. Louis, Missouri, he transported his movable goods and chattels in a "barefooted cart." In this era, when transportation seems to have reached the apex of its development, such a cart would be viewed with scorn, perhaps not recognized as a vehicle at all; but in Laclede's time, about the year 1760, and later, it was regarded very highly. It was particularly favored by such persons as were compelled to travel over the rough trails of interior America, perhaps into parts of the country having no roads at all, except the one they made as they progressed. For such use the barefooted cart, though crudely constructed and exceedingly slow in movement, had no equal.

A framework of two-by-four timbers, set upon a hand-hewn axle which was, in its turn, affixed to solid wheels sawed from tree-trunks—such was the barefooted cart, called so because of the fact that it had no tires. The wheels, of even size, were four inches thick, and about four feet across their widest surface. Axle-holes were burned through each wheel, in the center, and a peg, driven in the outside extension of the axle, held it in position. There were no springs, and the cart afforded the roughest of rough riding. It resembled a stripped gun-carriage, to a degree, and was almost always drawn by oxen, though in some instances the family cows furnished the locomotive power.

But the barefooted cart was simple of construction, requiring only such materials as were always to be had for the taking, and it was durable. It served the need of its day—a day when all America was a frontier. Some examples of such early-day wagon-making are still preserved and are highly valued by those who possess them.—E. F. W.



PANATELLA'S REDEMPTION

By CLEM YORE

Author of "Easy Goin' of the Box Plumb Bob" and "Micky Malone from San Antone"

When his cattle went into the greedy hands of a blood-sucking money-lender, the joy of life went out for Panatella; and the Rio Grande country came to know and to fear the scourge of the "Ace of Hearts"

THERE was a hush in the air—the muteness of a thousand stark and waterless miles. The silence of drouth it was; the stillness of sun-withered grass, root-nibbled by starving cows; the immobility of dust; burned and brittle plateaus; dried watercourses and ghastly sage, creosote-bush and greasewood, yucca and chaparral, out of which no coyote yapped.

The sky was a fiendish, brazen, glittering thing; hateful to the eye; loathsome, so that men lost the sense of looking upward for relief. Across it sailed the sun, mocking and detestable.

Men looked, always, upon the earth directly at their feet. It were as though some awesomeness lay just yonder where they dared not brave a vision.

The land was impoverished. It was "close the cases" on that valley. A new crop of pioneers must come in. The old brigade was beat, plumb tuckered out; they were done. That was it—done!

Why?

One and three-eighths inches of rainfall in twenty-seven months, and no snow in the high hills two hundred miles to the north. Reason enough!

But the rain was due and when it came it——

Yes, when it came! The country would not have a cow left, or a man to begin with.

And now the cattle were moving. The sheep and horses had already gone. The cattle were moving and had been for a week. Moving toward the railroad, in long and disconsolate strings; kicking up the dust; drifting along with faint and grotesque bellowings and hoof-knocking and horn-scrapings which carried through the sweltering air like the rolls of distant and abhorred drum-clatter. Days went by, and still they came and were whisked away along the hot steel rails. Old men shrugged their shoulders after them, women sobbed softly, tanned children stared wide-eyed; and after a little while the former owners of the cows followed their beasts. They were entitled to passes, some of them, and the railroad was generous. It had hauled them in; it would haul them out.

There were but two outfits left. Just

two out of twenty-eight, and one of these had already started its drive to town—to Fremont. Well named, that town. It had been close by that Col. John C. Fremont and his brave band of Florrisant men, from Missouri, had suffered such unspeakable privation. Now that drive was arriving. The last of the cows, except one bunch.

Two men sat on the top pole of a corral with boot-heels hooked to the pole below and their clothes and faces covered with dust. Their faces! These were sweat-streaked and grim, and in their eyes shone the same gray colors one could see on the sage and mesquite and greasewood. Their lips were caked and held tightly in straight lines, and they appeared through that rising, settling, sifting, drifting dust like stolid apparitions set there to complete the picture. They were watching cows go into the pens; the shipping pens and feed-lots; they were counting and checking cattle—pressure cattle.

Pressure-cattle!

Cattle being foreclosed under a chattel-mortgage and sold at auction, in the cars, fifty miles away, where one buyer only would bid.

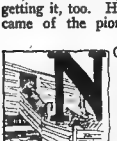
This band was the last of the cows that had been feeding up in the Little Ute Hills, where the grass had endured the longest, and where a few water-holes were left.

These fine beasts had been the property of Panatella.

They called him this because he was mild and slender.

Panatella! A name that meant much in that valley. Now Mellery, the banker at Fremont, who had stood by the country with every dime he had and every nickle of credit he could pry out of the big, spot-cash man of the down-state region, who was called Dick Renrut, had called for Panatella's cattle. And they had arrived.

Renrut, a squint-eyed, soft-spoken lunger whom the country had restored to health, was "bearing down" on the ranchers; was demanding his pound of flesh and getting it, too. He did not care what became of the pioneers.



NOW Panatella's cows were being checked and fed and driven into cars. Panatella had risen by sheer weight of character and courage, risen by the process of knowing cows and men, risen because he had traded the gifts of inspiration for the long shifts of perspiration. He worked all ends against the middle, and at last had seven thousand head running in a fine section of the upper valley. Then the drouth had come.

It hit him square and staggered him, but he was unafraid.

He and Mellery now had their boot-heels hooked on a stringer of the corral and were watching a few hands driving the dogged cattle into the pens and counting them as they went through a gate.

"Them's just the sort of cows that oughta be unloadin' yere instead of bein' shunted out of the country," commented Mellery.

"How many didja get in that pen, Alec?" shouted Panatella to a grizzled old cow-puncher sitting with a tally-tab in one hand and a lean leg folded around a saddle horn.

"One hundred and eighty," came back the answer.

"That makes five thousand, six hundred and forty, don't it, Mr. Mellery?"

"Yep. Check!"

"Pretty fair shape, too, considering?"

"They oughta be unloadin', instead of goin' out."

"Now, old fence-fixer," remarked Panatella bravely, "there just ain't no use you—goin' on thataway about them cows an' me. Why, yuh loaned me eighty thousand on 'em an' was a-carryin' paper that'd break the back of a brama-steer. I just missed it; that was all. Just plumb missed the grade. Don't yuh worry none. I'll cinch my belly-band a hole or two tighter, quit wearin' thirty-five dollar boots an' seventy-five dollar hats, blow out the lamp on this yere county, an' beat it for the Kootenai."

Mellery changed a foot, laid the hand with the tab across a forearm and slumped a shoulder. His limp Stetson, drooping about his face, concealed a twisted countenance; hid the movement of his teeth biting into a lower lip. Panatella went on.

"I ain't a-forgettin', either, that when I come to this country you an' Mr. Townley fed me pap, reared me from a colt, taught me my abc's an' was fathers to me. No, nor the time yuh believed in me; put yore money against my luck. I ain't forgettin' nothin', Mr. Mellery, not a thing. I'm twenty-seven, sound, good wind an' I reckon I got enough sand left to start all over ag'in; an' the next time I won't fail."

"Quit that kinda talk!"

"Thay's one thing I'd wish yuh'd do, though?"

Mellery raised his stricken face and stared at the young man. A question expired in a gulp, but his eyes urged a query.

"Pay Alec. I owe him a hundred. I managed Red, Smokey, Tolerable, Kansas an' the Chinaman cook, but I run outa coin by the time I got to Alec. The old horn-toad ain't got a bean."

"I'll pay him. But lissen, willya, boy?"

"I don't wanna lissen. Cain't I see every critter down there that moves is just like a bowie through yore heart? I'll be a-drittin'."

"You'll hear me!" replied the banker. "Son, this bunch will put me in the clear on yore loan. They'll average more'n ten dollars a head, for we got 'em out in time. But I wants you to know it's Renrut that's clampin' down on this valley. It's him as is stoppin' me from gettin' credit to carry this region. Why, Panatella, fifty thousand in feed would tide the whole kaboodle over till the rains come; an' everybody says it'll be yere in no time. But they's more'n yore cows."

"You don't mean——"

"Yes, I does! He's hinted he wants his money on the Townley string. I've got him to agree to wait six months, but it's all by word of his mouth; nothin' on paper. If he was to shut down on that Townley gal, now—why, I'd kill him!"

Panatella searched the old man's face.

"Uh-huh," continued Mellery. "He's representin' a lump of St. Louis money an' he says they're crowdin' him. Of co'se, if anything'd happen, I'd be liable."

"How liable?"

"I loaned Mazie Townley more money than them cows of hers would bring. I've not done much bankin' on that loan. You see I just reached in my heart an' brung out twenty-five thousand an' dropped it into her account. That's what I thought of her dead daddy; that's what I think of that pore little crippled, sad-faced thing. Now, if Renrut turned skunk, I'd have to kill him an' then turn bad, myself."

"Twenty-five thousand, yuh say?"

"Yep. But if we was to have three months good grass I'd get out enough of her cows to get almost in the clear. I'd handle the balance, somehow."

"How is Mazie?"

"Porely. I reckon if she knew what was a-goin' on down yere, it'd just about finish her. But it mustn't get out. I recalls the night Jim Townley died. He got a grip on my hands with his big flipper an' took 'em both; then he looked into my eyes an' he said, 'Mell, old podner, you an' me have rolled in the same blanket, fed outa the same fryin'-pan, run agin' the same towns, an' I reckon been a helluva lot to each other. Now, I'm a-askin' just one request. Stick to my little miserable gal, willya? She's all crippled up, an' she cain't nary time do much for herse'f. Willya daddy her after I'm gone?' Then he looked at me with them big eyes of his'n, an' he gripped my heart an' squeezed it dry. I told him I would, an' I have. You see the point, don't yuh? Dick Renrut knows it, too."

"Well, he mustn't do that. He mustn't get them cows."

"He may get 'em." Mellery held the youth's eyes for an instant, and then he added, "but he'll wrestle his Chili in hell right after he does."

"I seen Mazie, last Tuesday, told her I was a-goin' on a trip. Couldn't stand much of it, so I got outa there quick. Mr. Mellery, somehow, I thinks the big Trail-Boss of us all gets things jammed once in a while when he deals deuces to a girl like that an' gives me all he has. It don't seem right. I was ten year old when she come. Ten year on the Townley place, learned what I knows there, cut my teeth on a Townley wagon tongue, learned cows from the colonel, learned to love men just from seein' how Colonel Townley treated 'em. But, sometimes, lately, I've felt things inside me, things like I was at war all in my innards. You never knew, exactly, what kinda stock I got in me, didja?"

"No, son. Townley picked yuh up at a water-hole no'th the Wagon Mound, just after a hoss tradin' outfit passed through yere. I reckon yuh was goin' on two year old. That's what the two of us jedged, anyhow. I've told yuh all that before."

"Nary thing about—about my mother? I've asked yuh this a lot, but I figgers you're hidin' somethin'."

"Nope! Not a trace. There you was, a-bawlin' in the shade of a Joshua tree an' hungry as hell. That was all. We tried, but we never located the outfit that dropped yuh."

"A fella wonders about them things, at times."

"I know. But whoever yore mother was you shore got a heap of her in you. I been proud of you. You're just my kind of a man, Panatella. You got a sense of plumb right; an' I'd bet all I got, any time, that you run straight if you traveled for forty days an' forty nights."

Panatella's eyes narrowed. His lips drew in; his throat pulsed.

"Well, Mr. Mellery, I'm a-driftin' this mawnin'. I've brought down my string of relay hosses an' I was aimin' on goin'

on a little hoss-tradin' jaunt. You go on with the tallyin'; thay ain't no use of me stayin' yere, where the sight of me bu'ts yuh so. No, thay ain't no use a-stayin' on. I bring everything down from the ranch, everything. All I've got up there is a old ax what I drove head-deep in a choppin'-block. The fella what pulls it out will figger Panatella was mad as hell when he sunk it there."

"You stay yere! You hears me? I'll see you through."

"You go to the devil, old-timer. Cain't yuh see I'm damn near turned woman, already?"

"Well, come on over to the bank. I got a piece of change for yuh. An' I wanna open my mail."

THEY moved across the dusty road to the bank, where Panatella stood looking out of a window till Mellery glanced at the morning's mail. A quick exclamation from the older man made the young rancher turn suddenly and look into his face. That visage was drawn and distorted and the blood had drained from its cheeks. Mellery raised his eyes till they met Panatella's.

"It's come," he said in a ghostly voice.

"Renrut, you mean?"

"Here's orders to clamp down on the Townley cows, within thirty days. Thirty days! I oughta have a year."

Panatella moved from the window and read the letter.

"If I don't," he heard Mellery say, "I reckon it's me for a short stretch in the pen; an' they'd get the cows just the same."

Panatella dropped the letter.

"You was a-wantin' to give me a loan, a while ago," he said.

"Yes. That is, if yuh wants to go no'th. But why don't yuh head back to the Frio? You belongs with the yucca an' the pear. Up in the Kootenai the rain'd skeer yuh to death; the rain an' all them strange ways of handlin' big twelve hundred pound yearlin's. Why don't yuh decide to stick down South?"

"I feels like I oughta be driftin'."

The wrinkled old face of the cowboy-banker softened beneath the leathery tan and a long slender hand shot out and dropped on the boy's shoulder.

"Let's see what the cyards say," spoke Mellery. "I always like to cut the cyards in a jam. I'm South an' you is No'th. If you beats me for high-cyard, you go No'th. Otherwise you sticks down yere, someplace. Whatja say?"

Panatella agreed and Mellery brought forth a deck of cards.

Expertly, the old fingers riffled the pasteboards and then laid them on the top of a desk.

"I'll do my trick, first," the old man said, and cut.

He drew a knave of diamonds. Panatella reached for the pack, cut, and exposed an ace of hearts.

"It's the Kootenai, you see, don't yuh?" he remarked, casually.

"I won't go agin' the cyards," commented the banker; and walked back of the counter.

"Here's a hundred to see you on yore way," he said in a mellow tone, shoving some bills under a grating. Panatella folded them carefully, placed them in a shirt pocket and, as Mellery walked to join him, the young cowboy picked up the ace he had drawn and inserted it quickly beside the money. At that moment a desperate thought had come to birth in his mind; a desperate thought and a sudden decision. He shook as with cold, and looked across the road to where the spiraling dust arose above the shipping pens.

"You goin' to write?" asked Mellery.

"Of co'se; as soon's I light. But afore I go I want one promise from you."

"What?"

"Don't you go for to yank yore gun on Renrut. Promise?"

"No! I won't kill him. But I had oughta. I'll slide down to Santa Fé, an' if I cain't make it there, I'll hike up to Denver. I'll get some of it, somehow. Maybe!"

"You won't kill him?"

"No!"

"Thay's lots of Colonel Townley's friends runnin' cows down in Texas. Maybe if them fellas knew about this——"

"Shucks, they wouldn't shoot twenty-five thousand for a crippled gal, boy; it just ain't in the hearts of men to do them things."

"I reckon that's right. Well, I gotta be shovin' on. Soon's I sprinkle this string of hosses an' cheat a few of the smooth hoss-thieves I knows round about in the sage-bresh, I'll flop into a train an' braid myse'f No'th. So long. You're just one whale of a daddy, an' a twenty-four carat man, all ways."

Panatella patted a shoulder, gripped convulsive fingers, opened the bank door and

walked toward the pens. Here he met Alec and told him that Mellery would pay the wages due. Then he spoke affectionately to the old cow-hand and laid a hand on his knee and gazed into his face as he sat his pony.

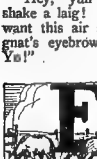
"You don't know what I'm a-thinkin', Alec?" he asked.

For some seconds the old face stared in his; then Alec swung his pinto about and shouted at one of the other hands, "Hey, Smokey, watch that big 'blue! Do you want him to run hawk-wild among them calves? Cut him out I tells yuh!"

And thus Panatella broke the last tie that bound him to that valley. That valley where for twenty-five years the very heat had been a joy. As he strung out his string of hard-riding relay horses, he ground his teeth. Something in his nature had left him; something had crystalized in that fine body; some quality had come to birth that killed his soul. When at last he got under way there dwelt in his eyes a cruel and repulsive light; his smiling lips had changed into a hateful snarl, and thin, wretched puckers about his eyes told of a mental torture.

Twice he gazed back at the little town and beyond it to the broad sun-swept plain they called the valley; then he bowed his head on his breast and his shoulders heaved and sank; his legs shook as though they were cramping. After a while he raised his face, wiped out his eyes with the knuckle of a forefinger and shouted at the walking horses ahead.

"Hey, yuh dust-eatin' road-burners, shake a laig! Get outa yere! Does yuh want this air sun to shrivel us up to a gnat's eyebrow? Yi! Damn yuh! Yi! Yo!"



FIFTY miles away, at Cremona, Panatella slid around the town and continued south. Every fifteen miles he left a horse with a ranch, saying he would return, when he came north, and pay for its keep. Invariably these friendly cowmen told him to leave it in the home corral and get it when he wanted it, night or day. There'd be no charge.

After the last pony had been placed he made a wide circle, and riding one horse, cantered slowly back to Cremona, reaching the town in six days. It was Saturday. He waited till a few minutes before the bank was due to close and then walked into the building. He saw Renrut alone, writing at a side desk. No one else was in the building. Panatella made sure of that. Then he glanced up and down the small dusty street, saw that no person was watching or moving about, stooped over a boot, as though fixing a spur, and adjusted a bandana about his face. When he straightened up he sprang into the bank, covered Renrut with a bone-handled six-gun, slammed the door shut and pulled down its shade. Next he drew all the blinds, marching the banker before him.

"Fill that up with paper," he ordered, tossing a grain sack to the banker. "It's goin' to be Monday before you open up ag'in."

In an incredibly short time he had secured twenty-seven thousand dollars in currency and gold, bound and gagged Renrut and locked him in a closet of a back room. Then he made an exit through a side door, set its catch, and closed it.

Before he closed the door on the banker he had taken the ace of hearts from his pocket and laid it on a table.

"If anybody asks you who done this yere job," he said, "just tell 'em it was the Ace of Hearts. An' whenever you sees thist air cyard, in the future, you think of this day. I'll be a-comin' back, sometime, if I hears about you carryin' any more grief to cowmen, an' the next time I'm goin' to make you leak a lot of sin."

He chuckled fiendishly as he swung into his saddle, and, reaching gracefully to the ground, pulled up the sack.

He turned his pony about and set a rapid course dead south, as a Mexican crow would fly. In an hour he had made fifteen miles. Here he changed saddles on the first relay-horse and continued his flight. At the ranch he found all hands away. The women were up to town; he saw that the buckboard was not under the wagon-shed.

On he went through the night, changing a mount every fifteen miles. That relay string had come in handy, and now he was tearing through the utter blindness of the dark at a terrific speed. Just before dawn, when he was one hundred and fifty miles from Cremona, he was startled by a drop of water falling upon the back of his hand. He turned his face to the sky and saw the hurrying black masses swooping down upon the dry earth; there was a sob in the air, a cry in his heart—and then came the rain. It fell in sheets; it poured in long solid ribbons; and through it he tore like one trying to escape a vast malignity.

After a while a smile wreathed his lips.

"Thay won't be much of a trail left of them ponies of mine, agin' mornin'," he mused. "This old rain is shore beatin' the desert. It shore is!"

Below him the roadless earth was nothing but mud, yellow and brown and sodden mud.

Two days later Panatella stepped from a train at El Paso, hurried to a hotel where he boxed up twenty-five thousand dollars and shipped it by express to Mellery. On top of the money there was this note:

To pay the Townley chattel.

That was all.

He rode back to Victoria, secured his last horse from a Mexican rancher across the line, and after a few hours' rest disappeared in the prickly-pear, which stretched as far as the eye could see.

The next day was the first of April and the desert was riotous with beds and spots of wild-flowers. Panatella sang and whistled, and somehow from his high spirits flowed a feeling of self-contempt that was also a satisfaction.

"Now you've shore enough turned wolf," he said aloud. "I reckon you knows, Panatella, what kind of blood is in yuh now. It shore came out. Just a low-down, no 'count, killin'-streak hombre. An' you kin bet yuh gotta keep on goin' bad, if yuh wanna keep on goin' a-tall."

UP IN Denver old man Mellery sat talking to the cashier of one of the largest banks. In an outer room clerks were counting twenty-five thousand dollars in currency and gold. Soon they returned and said something to the cashier, then moved away to standing desks and assumed their duties.

"Mellery," spoke the official, "I'm mighty sorry about this state of affairs at Fremont. And I'm of the opinion that this bank will have something to say to Dave Renrut from this time on. I had no idea he was such a coyote. Why, it'll take five years to get back what you fellows have lost. But next month I'd like to come down and look over that section. Maybe we could put in a loan there by a company organized for that purpose, and get the valley on its feet."

"I dunno, I declare, I dunno," replied the old man, "you see I'll need a little time to get back my nerve. Maybe, when the grass is up ag'in, I'll write yuh an' you can come down an' he'p us out. I believe them boys that left would come back, if I told 'em you fellas was standin' back of me."

"We'll see," said the cashier. "I'll send this draft to Renrut at once and I'll tell him what I think."

"That's it. I don't want no mo' dealin's with him. If I has 'em, I'll kill him."

"I don't blame you."

Mellery moved away and left the building. Down the street he met old Alec, who peered into his face with a look of utter stupefaction.

"Did it work?" he said anxiously.

"Like it was greased. They never said a thing. If that money was marked, it shore is mixed up now. All these town boys up yere'll be spendin' it fancy-like inside a week. I shore heaved a sigh of content when that cashier looked up at me."

Then rapidly Mellery told what had occurred while he was in the bank.

"Colonel, thay's a train breakin' south after dinner an' I reckon I'm goin' to be squattin' in it. Got any mo' orders?"

"Nope. Only, Alec, you keep a-holdin' to that desert till yuh find that boy. Hear me?"

"You don't have to fuss at me. I cares for him as much as you do. Are you shore Renrut don't s'picion who it was stuck him up?"

"No; he was so skeered when they took him outa that closet he yapped like a kid. Said all he could see was a pair of gray eyes filled chock-full of murder. Why, he give the boy's weight as a-hundred an' sixty, an' his height as five foot ten. He's one hundred and ninety an' a good six foot one. I knows he ain't got a thing on Panatella."

"Let's go eat! An' what I means is—eat! When a fella worries he shore loses appetite. I ain't worryin', now. Let's have oysters!"

"Come on!"

That afternoon Alec set out to find Panatella, and the search took him five long years.

MEN come and go on the border like buzzards, and one never knows where or when. One day a name is made; tomorrow a man has been forgotten. Fear spreads very quickly and becomes a thing magnified as it rolls

along through the sage and *tovoso*, the yucca and cacti. Love is like this, too; and the tales one hears are almost incredible.

For five years a name had stirred the international border. It was a vague appellation; a grace and a disgrace. It came as a boon to poor peons; it hung as a hated omen on the American side of the Rio Grande. Women smiled, secretly; hoped in the privacy of their adobes that sometime the great *compañero* of the poor would come for succor at their door. Ah—that would be a treat.

Twelve banks had been plundered; twenty mines had been robbed at the exact moment of the richest shipments; fifteen station agents had been compelled to give over important pay-roll 'satchels. At the scene of each of these outrages, after the crime, the ace of hearts had been found. Always, it was the same. The ace of hearts.

The very phrase on men's lips brought a curse and a thrill. They said this band of swarthy Mexicans was led by a genius. No man had ever seen that formidable visage—that is, no man who had been robbed. No! It was spoken of in whispers that no one ever would see behind that impenetrable red bandana. There was a good reason; the face was the face of a spirit. Those brigands had hinted as much.

They were led by a ghost. A gray intangible creature.

Reward notices were everywhere, even in the depths of the sage, but they availed nothing. When all was serene and men had begun to think the depredations had ceased, there came the farflung alarm of another swift raid. The news of some awesome bit of daring that made the border gasp; that border which has experienced every thrill known to man for the past three hundred years. Then came a final dash of one hundred miles into New Mexico. Twelve of their own dead were left on the trail of the bandits back to Chihuahua, but the captain of the band escaped over the line. The *rurales* were not at that point, and the Americans did not cross the boundary. But six thousand dollars of the loot did.

Yet the identity of the Ace of Hearts was not divulged. The high power rifles had done their work too well. They left only dead men; and so it was the two countries fumed with their human trackers at the boundary. And, after a few days, these went back home.

THE Rio del Carmen rises, runs and vanishes in the desert. At one end, call it mouth or source, is the city of Carmen; at the other Encinillas. West, the Rio de Santa Maria flows out of the sizzling desert mountains into the lake named Santa Maria.

On one of the high crimson bluffs overlooking the Rio del Carmen valley a tall, gaunt figure hung over its saddle watching, with the eyes of an eagle, a small line of moving dots crossing the desert below. Fringing these specks of color was an embroidery of hazy yellow. Dust! Dust kicked up by rapidly moving horses. The bending form smiled and raised its length in the stirrup.

"Race, yuh yellow-belly centipedes! Race an' be damned to yuh," he said. "I'm headin' outa this sand to where a man kin see a bit of green."

And when the dust had scurried into the horizon maze, to the south, the lone horseman jogged down from the cliffs and allowed his blue roan to drink in the flowing stream of mud. He himself bathed his face and tried to bathe a part of his shirt. Some of the streaks vanished, or changed color; all but one great splotch up near a right shoulder. This was sticky and black, and a hole in its center spoke of a bullet that had entered there.

Down the willows went the man and the horse, for a mile or more till the sound of a human voice made the man halt and dismount.

That voice! It came to him like a caress. It stole softly, sweetly out of the air like the sound of glass wind chimes. He translated the quaintly spoken Spanish in rough fashion; translated it word by word, sentence by sentence. And this is what he learned:

In swift, brief days when I cease loving you,
I'll not repent because I give you pain;
I'll smile at you if on the road we meet, my love,
But loving you I'll ne'er do that again.
To kiss today, and to forget tomorrow—
It is my life; then take this thought to heart.
In the madness of your kisses,
Let your heart aches turn to blisses;
What matters it though in an hour we part.

He parted the brush and stared down the river.

There on the opposite bank he saw a girl.

She was sitting in the shade and behind her was a large looking-glass and in her hand was a small mirror.

Her mantilla, employed as a drape about her upper body, had been discarded, and he saw that her back was bare. And also he saw, on her right shoulder blade, a seared and blotchy mark.

A brand it was. The Lazy A!

Blood leaped into his face and he rustled the willows and took a step that she might hear and cover her shoulders. Then he strode into the open.

"Good day, señorita," he said.

The sound of his voice startled him and he swayed ever so little in his tracks; ever so little, but that trifling stagger had been noted by the large brown eyes which gazed into his.

"It is a fine day, señor," she replied. "You are faint?"

He spoke her language fluently, and, as she replied more like a question than a greeting, it seemed to him that the desert and the muddy, sluggish Rio del Carmen flowing at his feet had been transformed into a fairyland and a silvery, rippling brook.

"I would rest but a moment, if I may."

"For the love of the good God, you are wounded!"

"It is nothing, señorita; it is but a pin scratch. But it needs a little pure water to wash it clean. A little clean water and a pair of lovely hands. After that,- a golden gringo coin for the maiden who is my nurse. What say you?"

"A golden coin!" the girl crossed herself and glanced instinctively toward the blazing sky. "With a golden coin——"

"What then?"

She looked away from him; then swiftly turned and met his gaze.

"Have you a horse?" she asked, plaintively.

"*Ai!* And such a horse. You shall see him."

He whistled, softly and through the fringe of the river growth there came the tall and rangy roan, which stood at his side and rubbed his muzzle against his arm.

"I have named him Cry Baby," he said; then grasped at the fender of the stirrup and looked blankly at the girl.

She swept to his side, swiftly, held a slim arm around him, and thus steadied him. He rallied; the passing faintness fled and he smiled.

"Where?" was all he said.

"There," she pointed up the stream, "where we leave no trail. Can you mount, señor?"

For answer he lifted a foot to the hidden stirrup, in the long, hand-embossed, concha-covered taps, touched the horn with a hand, threw a leg into the cantle and was seated; then he kicked loose a foot and smiled once more at the girl. She sprang behind him; and the roan headed up the middle of the shallow water.

Half a mile they went, till they came to a gravelly beach and out on this they rode into a dense thicket of chaparral and pear. A little further on they turned into a shady box-canyon, and under some tall cottonwoods they stopped while she helped him dismount. By the forefeet of his horse he saw a trickle of water. It was crystal-clear, and as his eyes traced its bed he discerned that it came from the bottom of a ledge not fifteen feet away. Then before his eyes the earth turned into a formless, mobile texture of mottled gray. He was conscious of a downward movement and felt a pair of arms clutch at his body. Then darkness, and he knew no more.

WHEN he awoke the stars were staring down at him out of a pale sky. From the Southern heavens a thin light filtered into the gulch, and he discerned mere traceries of the trees. Moon shadows.

His brain had cleared and no longer did he feel the throb and fever that, all day, had run along his arm. It was numb, but it did not pain. He turned his head and gazed about him.

Recollections came swiftly. Even a passage of the song. He saw the shapely shoulders, the blotch on the shoulder blade, the delicate color and texture of the flesh, and heard the voice which had reminded him of wind-chimes.

"In swift, brief days when I cease loving you,
I'll not repent because I give you pain."

"Shucks!" he ejaculated aloud. "Panatella, you is shore one funny hombre."

"What is it?" the sound of a voice scarcely raised above a murmur stole into his ear.

He turned at the query and saw the girl lying prone at the base of a tree, directly at his head.

"I awakened, and," he hesitated, "I missed you."

"You are better, señor?" she spoke in the quiet, even tones with which one soothes a distracted child. Her hand reached out and touched his forehead. "There is no fever. On my soul you are better."

"*Ai!*" he whispered, soothed at the touch of her fingers and using the Mexican and Yaqui sibilant. "I am like one lost in a dream."

"Sleep, friend. We are *compañeros* and tomorrow we must plan. I, too, have hounds on my trail."

"You know me?" he asked.

"Nay, and I care not," she replied; "you are a man. And I prayed that you might live. I cleaned the big, deep hole in your shoulder. It ran through and through, and I washed it clean. Then I made a paste of certain plants and laid the sticky stuff on both ends of that hole. I tell you I know a man. And your flesh, señor, it is white. More white than cream."

"Where is your home? Your people?"

"Beyond Encinillas, a little mile. There my people live, but I have come this way. I am making for the north. For the Pass to the North. Know you a city by that name? Are you not of that land? That big land where a woman is not—a chicken or a sheep?"

"Yes, I am a gringo. Why did you leave?"

"A man!"

"Are you a wife?"

"No!"

"Then why——"

"I am a maid. A good girl, señor. One of the lowly ones. I read a little, a very little; I sew a bit and play on the guitar. I have some goats, and this is my work. It was happy toil till Aguabella saw me. Then, since then, I have been like a rabbit that is young who is watched by a coyote. He has bragged, señor! My mother has sold me. That is why. Do you not see?"

"When?"

"No, no, my friend, not what you think—not that! I ran away. But he put his mark on me."

"I saw it. I saw it, the Lazy A when the mantilla fell from your shoulders. Your shoulders are very beautiful, señorita, like those of a princess."

"I did not know." She hung her head. "I did not hear you."

"But I heard you and it seemed you were happy. Where did you get the mirrors?"

"I brought them with me, so that I could feed my hate and not perish in the long night-walks across the desert to the Rio Grande. I was courageous enough for that, I tell you."

The soothing fingers strayed into the tangled locks above his brow. He did not reply.

"While you slept," she continued, "I retraced my steps down the river to where we met and brought back the mirrors."

"And nothing more?"

"There was nothing more, señor. There, over there, one, two, maybe three mountain miles, very lonely miles, is a tender of sheep. He has food."

"Is not that the land called from the brand of cattle, the Lazy A?"

"It is. You know, my friend, you know the Lazy A?"

For answer he raised his uninjured arm and stroked her wrist gently, and half turned his head to look into her face.

"Yes, I know that brand; and Aguabella, too. He is a wild hog. Sometime the buzzards shall feast. It is their due."

A sharp intake of breath sounded above his head.

"Merciful Mother," she whispered, "if I could live to such a day. That man, señor, one day last March, riding alone, came to my mother's house and put in the window a small coin. That night my mother took me to his hacienda. And there she left me. First taking from that blue-faced beast a few golden pieces. I tell you it shined yellow as butter, that gold. When she went away some of the women brought in a hot iron and he made a speech to his people. I cannot tell you what he said, but, when he was done he jerked my mantilla from my body. And then—oh, my friend—then that iron hissed like a snake and a stab of pain ran through me like a fire. Some women rushed and one of them caught me as I swooned and poured oil on the burn. I was his, señor, and no man can claim me. That mark of the Lazy A is like a notch in the ear of a sheep. I am his, six months from that day."

"*Quien sabe*, señorita? Much can happen before that time. I am not one of those who forget easily. And did you not say we are *compañeros* and must plan on the morrow?"

"I did. I did, señor, and I shall get us food, too, tonight."

"Was there a place for my horse to feed, my friend?"

"I saw to that. But the saddle was heavy, and the saddle bags. I was afraid to look in the flaps."

"You would have seen gold, señorita. A bag of gold. Some of it shall be yours. Can you ride a horse, without a saddle?"

"*Ai!*" she answered eagerly. "The roan is at the grass now."

His faint whistle sounded through the canyon and a hurry of hoofs came back as its echo. The horse edged across the spring water and the man rubbed its muzzle.

"Bridle it, *chiquita*, and be not afraid. He will take you like the wind and is as gentle as a fat old mare. Get food, my littlest one, food for you and me. I have not eaten since yesterday."

In a moment she was gone.

When next he awoke the glare of a small fire cast a yellow tint over his face. Before the flame the squatting figure of the girl looked like a piece of bronze touched with gold. Her hair wafted about in a faint stir of air, and through it the campfire's glow shone like the radiancy of a halo. He made no sound, but watched her as she prepared the contents of a pot. Soon she looked his way and smiled as she saw his open eyes.

"Señor has been watching me," she muttered coquettishly.

"Not thee, my child," he said affectionately, "but it seemed an angel sat by a campfire."

"I have news for you. News that will make you glad. The man who tended sheep is no longer there, but in his place is a boy I know. He was a child with me and often have we sung and played together. He has given me plenty food. Two ounces of coffee. And tomorrow he will come with the wagon and we shall take you where he lives, till you become a well man. Then, who knows? We shall go into your country and I shall be free."

"Yes," he answered, "who knows?"

When the food was ready she served him daintily, and when he had refreshed himself she made a pillow of the saddle blanket and her *serape* and placed his head upon it. His cheek brushed her knee and she stroked his hair and sang. When he awoke the day was no longer young and, there, tumbled in a little heap was the girl, one arm thrown pitifully across her eyes.

THE weeks fled by, and the American had been restored to health and was living high in the hills where the cool piñon grew. From the ridge he could see the movements of men on the desert below him, and could race to safety down either side were circumstances to demand his flight.

In a little hut beside that of the herder the girl lived.

The small hunchback boy who watched over the flocks of the baron of that region had made many pilgrimages to the little town and had brought back needed things. Always he carried the gringo's silver; he was too cautious to use the gold.

The tall, silent American would sit in the shade of the *jacal* and listen to the song of the girl. The days of trouble that had weighed him down were no longer remembered. The long, hard rides, the dust, the grim enterprise of outlawry was forgotten; the comrades who had fought and stolen with him were now merest images of a detestable period of his existence. The shell of his bitter nature had burst and a gentler thing was blooming there. One July day he whispered to the girl as she sat at his feet drumming the strings of her guitar; whispered in strange tones.

"Sing me that song you were singing when I came upon you on the banks of the Carmen."

"Not that, not that wicked song, for thee, my dear. That is a wine-song, a song for the men who drink *aguardiente*. It is the music of the flirt. I cannot flirt with thee. I love so. I love so, it seems at times, when I am there in the dark of my room, when the whimpers of the sheep, or the cry of the wolf or the wail of the little sand-owl is heard, it seems to hurt. Do you know how it is? Deep in my soul."

But he made no reply. Yet a melting quality came into his face, a soft and drowsy light welled into his eyes. His lips framed a word, parted, reformed the sound, and yet no voice was heard.

"I knew what your heart said," she murmured. "It told me of your love. I am glad! You are a good man. When will we leave these hills? When will we begin to build our home?"

He placed a hand on her hair and she dropped her face against his knee. His eyes reached out beyond the trees, out over the desert to where he knew the Rio Grande flowed, and he thought of a cer-

tain hole, in the bank of that desolate river, where a vast hoard of money lay. A large amount of paper and gold and some silver bars. Here was the spot he must reach with pack-animals before he could rush to freedom with this child.

Then he softly sang the words of an old border ballad.

"Some of these days we'll go a-ridin',
Some of these days, just you an' I.
Some of these days, when Trouble's slidin',
We'll let the world go slippin' by.
Some of these days, we'll find our level,
Some of these days, we'll laugh an' sing,
Some of these days, we'll romp an' revel,
An' play the devil, with a weddin' ring."

"How sweet a tune," she whispered. "You are a good man. And when we are wed you must teach me many of your beautiful songs."

"It is not much of a song, *mia chiquita*," he answered, "and I am not much of a singer. But some of these days when Pablo and you think the time is come we shall send for the padre and, here, in these hills, he shall marry us. Then shall we ride!"

He felt her shake, a little, and the most trifling of half-cries came from her throat.

In a bound she was in his arms and her lips had found his; her fingers were interlocked behind his neck.

When Pablo came in for supper he found them thus and with a shrug went on about his business. When he had laid the firewood beside the hearth the girl heard his muffled steps and jumped away from her lover. And as she busied herself with the cooking of the evening meal Pablo came and rubbed his forefingers at her as a mark of mock-shame. Then she took him by the arm and told him of her happiness.

When the twilight had vanished the three talked a very long time and it was agreed that on the morrow the hunchback boy and the girl would go to the valley in the wagon. A few miles from the city Pablo would leave her in the trees and proceed into town, alone. The priest would be brought to the girl and there it would be decided when the wedding would be held. She could carry five large golden coins to the padre, for the glory of God, and to make the marriage a happy one.

Panatella went back to his covert on the hill and in his heart a vast joy was surging like a flood.

BEFORE dawn the boy and the girl had harnessed a team of burros and, seated in a desert-wagon, went slowly down the mountain. Panatella watched the sheep all that day and when night came he remained by the huts in a nervous state, looking, looking, down the slope up which he knew the boy and the girl must drive.

Sometime after midnight he heard a rush of wheels and, after a moment, Pablo stood quivering before him, too stricken to speak.

"Tell me!" cried Panatella. "Tell me what has happened to her."

"When I had brought the padre to the hiding-place, she was not there. We searched; and at eight o'clock tonight we found her hanging to a mile-post. Hanging there, in the moonlight, by the wrists like a beautiful sacred shape, swaying in the wind."

"Where?"

"At the forks of the highway which runs to Guzman. Señor, she had been stripped of her clothes and they had flayed her, alive! Beaten her with a bull-whip!"

"Who?"

"Aguabella! There were frightened children hiding in the mesquite, and they saw; and told the padre. Only twice did that whip cut into her back, those children said. Then she died. The padre said it was of shame, or of a broken heart. She was never meant to be a woman, señor. No! Nor wife. She was an angel! I tell you I know. I have been with her, day by day, since she was a babe. Now, señor, she is a memory—just a beautiful dream."

"Where is she now?"

"At the home of the padre."

"Where is that?"

"Beside the church."

"And where will *he* be? I mean that beast."

"They say he went blind with rage, when death had cheated him, and is down in the drinking-place. He will kill a man, before he will quiet down. It is always thus with him. He turns mad, he drinks, and then he slays."

Panatella said no more; he uttered no sound of grief. He helped the cripple to unharness the team and put it in the corral; then walked slowly to his retreat, his chin sunk low upon his breast.

The next morning, before day, a timid tapping came upon the window of the

priest and the aged man stole from his bed, peered through the white curtains into a drawn and ghastly countenance.

"Come in, my son," he said genially, "you will find the door behind the climbing roses."

Panatella stood bareheaded in the room while a lamp was lighted.

"You!" exclaimed the priest, "You?"

"The girl who was flogged, Father—it was I who wanted to make her my wife."

"God was good to her, that he gave her death."

"You know me?"

"Yes. I am the priest who was carried by a certain brigand out of the desert when I had fallen faint. It was a noble deed of this man, who even then was hunted by two countries. I have reason to believe you are called the Ace of Hearts."

"What matters a name? I came to see that she is given a holy burial. I want it splendid. It must be the best church funeral this town has ever had. I want it immense. I want it big, big, I tell you."

"She loved you, my boy?"

"*Ai*, and, Father, she thought me good. That is the curse of it all. I see the finger of God in it. She was not intended for such as I."

He gave a bag of gold into the hands of the priest.

"I baptised that child; I shall bury her. And such a burial! Would you care to see her face?"

Panatella stared at a room indicated by a raised hand and stepped through its door. When he entered the darkened room the priest followed him with a single candle and placed it beside a small stand on which was a crucifix. There, stretched out beneath a white cloth, he saw the figure of the girl.

Gently, he laid back the fabric which concealed her face and her red lips smiled up at him; pouted up at him, as it were, and she seemed to be but shamming sleep. The priest tiptoed from the room as he heard a groan die in the big man's throat and saw him sink to his knees beside the rough planks on which the dead girl lay.

When Panatella came out, a little later, his face was that of a dead man; the soul of a fiend stared out of the features of a beast.

"Padre," he said like a man talking in a dream, "you will allow me a few hours' start before you put the dogs on me, won't you?"

"Go in peace, my boy; I shall say no word to harm thee. Go and may God ride with thee and bring thee content."

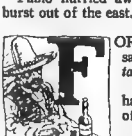
Panatella bowed to the old man, picked up his hat, and opening the door, looked slowly back at the wan light of the candle and the shadowy face which even then caught his eye. Silently closing the door, he disappeared.

When he had been gone but a moment Pablo came and knocked upon the door of the padre.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Gone!" answered the trembling old man. "Gone with the ashes of love in his heart and the flames of hell and hate burning in his eyes. Follow him, my son, follow him and see that no harm comes to him in this town."

Pablo hurried away just as the dawn burst out of the east.



FOR hours Aguabella had sat at one table in the *taberna*.

And for hours they had watched him. All of them.

The herders of sheep, the drivers of cattle, the tradesmen, the three dancing girls watched him; and no one dared leave the room. Frequently he wet his lips with a licking tongue; frequently he closed his eyes and seemed to seep. Then like a cat he would open them and furtively look upon the people.

His money lay in a small pile on the table. He ordered every man's drinks and a waiter came and took the exact change from the small mound of silver and copper. Aguabella was like a volcano. Any instant he might hurl death about him.

When the first stray streaks of day filtered through the small eastern window, he yelled, "Put out the lamps!"

Then the door opened and a tall American entered the room and stood at the bar.

"Which of you is the food for buzzards?" he asked mockingly. "I have traveled far to find a man who has been misnamed by miserable parents."

"What name, *amigo*?" sneered Aguabella.

"Aguabella," retorted the man. "The name is beautiful water in my tongue. But I have a better for it in Spanish."

"Speak it quickly, you son of a pig!"

"*Inmundicia!*"

"I speak your tongue, you dog! And I know you mean to call me filth. In five minutes you shall be in hell."

Panatella smiled.

"They have told me you are a great shot with a revolver, señor," he said.

A girl was nervously twirling the stem of a wine glass at a table against a side wall. Aguabella caught the act, pulled a revolver from his waist and the glass shivered into bits as the girl screamed. Panatella's hand had tilted a gun in a holster; his thumb held back its hammer. Aguabella caught the action.

"Not bad," said Panatella. "Get up from that chair and look at me. Do you know why I kill you?"

Aguabella was upon his feet. Now was he in his mood. He was to kill. After that sleep would be peace to him, and he would go home.

"Who can tell what is in the brain of a gringo?" he hurled.

His revolver was slowly rising when Panatella's left hand dropped to a gun butt and uptilted the barrel. Aguabella saw the movement and knew that death was not far away. Quickly he flung out both arms, the revolver held in the right hand.

"We will fire at each other when I have counted ten, as I walk from you, señor. Are you willing?" he screamed.

"Count, damn you, count, and walk as you count!" shouted the American in English. "I kill you because you murdered the loveliest girl that ever lived—beat her with a whip!"

"So, it was you, was it? One!" Aguabella's voice was a curse.

He took a step backward.

"Two!" he screeched. "What are you fumbling with above your heart? I'll bed my bullet there."

Panatella was feeling in a pocket of his shirt. A smile was his only answer.

"Three! Four!"

At this word a playing card caught the eye of the Spaniard. He saw it rising as if by magic out of the depths of the shirt pocket. It was held between the thumb and forefinger of the American's left hand. It charmed the receding man staring at its glistening surface.

"Five!" The number rang through the room like the squeal of a rabbit caught by a weasel.

"The Ace of Hearts!" Aguabella shouted. "I'll go no further with this fight. I tell you I'll go no further."

"Count, you yellow murderer," commanded Panatella, "or I'll do it for you. If you don't want to walk, then count. Fifteen feet is close enough for you to kill a man. Look in my face."

"Six!" and the word was scarcely audible in the room. The onlookers stood with bulging eyes and mouths agape. That awesome name, the Ace of Hearts, had chilled every mind in the room.

"Seven!" and at the word Aguabella's eyes, now riveted upon the fingers and the thin and shining pasteboard, dilated till the whites of the balls showed full around the iris.

Then his revolver leaped and a spurt of flame flew from it, just a fraction after another tongue of fire leaped from the hip of Panatella.

The Spaniard slumped to the earthen floor of the room. His fingers clutched at the caked dirt; a leg quivered and a long tremor ran along his stringy frame. After that he lay without movement.

He had been shot between the eyes.

Above the American and on a line with his head, pieces of adobe were falling to the floor.

Panatella flung some coins on the bar and held the small group at the end of the room by a taunting stare.

"It was an ancient custom with the natives of this valley, in the days of the friars, that when a traveler went upon a dangerous journey that the people drank his health," he said in a mocking manner. "Drink, my friends. Drink, I say, to me! I may be riding a road the end of which is death."

He opened the door, mounted his horse and clattered away.

Exactly at the moment of his exit through the front door Pablo entered through a side arcade and saw the blanched faces of those within staring down at a form on the floor. He joined the frightened men and women and was the first to break the silence.

"Aguabella whipped to death the girl the gringo was to marry. He did it with a rawhide whip and now she lies in the home of the padre. My friends, is it not the justice and vengeance of God that has killed this man?" And his toe touched the sleeve of the corpse.

"Still, thou crippled fool! He who did this deed was none other than the gringo rider-of-death, the Ace of Hearts!"

"The Ace of Hearts!" shrieked the boy; and then, before he was aware of what he was saying, he had exclaimed, "For weeks I have lived with him and the girl up in the high hills at the sheep corrals of Aguabella."

"Ah! Ho! You will tell the *comandante* of that, mark you! You will tell

him many things," yelled the proprietor. "Scatter you fools, and tell the *rurales!* They must ride if they catch this man. Run, some of you, and take this twisted-back scum with you."

Pablo was hurried to the jail.

AS PANATELLA came in sight of Ciudad Morales two nights later the roan threw a shoe, sliding down a shale slide, and before it could catch itself had stepped into a rock-crevice and broken a front leg. Panatella wrapped the saddle blanket around his revolver, to deaden the sound of its discharge, and shot the gallant beast back of the ear.

He picked up his saddle, bridle and blanket and trudged slowly toward the single glimmer which he knew to be the town. In an hour he was located in a boarding-house, his saddle stored in his room and he himself stretched out in sleep. Next morning he awoke and, after breakfast, went abroad to purchase another horse. Passing the stage-office, he heard a group of men upbraiding a Mexican for refusing to take out the stage. The talk conveyed to him the information that the Yaquis were reported out twenty miles ahead, and that passengers who had been booked had cancelled their passage because of the driver's refusal.

As Panatella walked away he did some fast thinking.

Here was a chance. His chance.

He had proceeded to a livery-stable and was about to enter it when a man, almost his identical figure, stepped up to him and spoke.

"I'm shore glad to see yuh, fella," the stranger said. "I'm rarin' to talk United States."

"Tear in," replied Panatella. "I was about to buy a hoss, yere. I'm somewhat in a hurry."

"Me, too," answered the man. "They tells me the stage-line's sewed up over a Yaqui scare. I gotta get to Victoria, right now."

Inspiration came to Panatella.

"Yere's my ridin' things," he said quickly. "My hoss broke a laig last night, an' I'm plumb afoot. Now, I tells yuh what I'll do. You take this outfit, go in yonder, an' buy you one of them little old fryin'-pan hosses; an' I'll run up an' drive the stage out."

"Thay's four to it; kin yuh drive four?"

"Hell, yes. Six or eight of them kind. I was raised with a fistful of ribbons. I'll burn up the pear with them runts."

"If I could 'a' done it, I'd been gone afore now. For it's stay yere till the skeer is over. Them Yaquis put the fear o' God in a greaser's heart so it stays put, an' they won't run that bus for thirty days, if them Injuns stays riled that long. I'll take yore saddle, pardner, an' I'll catch you along the road. You needn't wait. But you won't have a passenger."

Panatella dropped his riding-gear and hurried back to the transportation depot, where he arranged to drive the stage, one way, to Isabella, forty miles distant, carrying mail. When the horses had been hooked to the stage he cracked a long whip over the leaders and whirled away amid the plaudits of a small crowd just as the man who had borrowed his saddle trotted out of a corral. All the morning the two traveled together across the desert.

Horses were changed at a relay-post, at noon, and on went the light rig once more. News had come into the station that the line was free of Indians ahead and the change-hands thought the fear of a raid was without foundation; yet Panatella and his companion maintained a constant vigil. Both knew Yaquis.

At three o'clock a lone buzzard caught Panatella's eye as it narrowed the circles of its flight immediately ahead.

"See that blow-out formation, up yonder?" he said to his escort. "When we gets in among that stuff, I reckon yuh better go ahead an' see what yuh c'n see."

"I gotcha. Yuh figgers that old air-rooster is a-lookin' at somethin' which ain't us, eh?"

"That's it. That sure-thing sky-gambler never pays no attention to what's on the move. But he's shore spotted something that's lyin' down. He sees meat."

"All right, I reckon I'll get organized right yere. I got my old saddle-gun, after I left you, an' it ain't been hot for so long I reckon she won't know how to act." After filling the magazine of the carbine he overtook the stage, where he said to Panatella, "I'm shovin' on to the top o' this grade, an' if it's all right I'll shake my bonnet for yuh to come up. If it ain't, I'll——"

He tore away. Reaching the summit, he stared about him for a few seconds and then signaled the stage.

"This old razor-back is shore hell for rough," he said to Panatella as the wagon

drew beside him, "an' if yuh don't mind I'll tie him behind an' crawl up with you an' ride like a gentleman."

"Come on," said Panatella.

When he had secured his horse and had taken a seat he suddenly spoke to Panatella as the horses began the down-grade.

"What makes them damn critters act thataway?" he asked. "Look at that old wheeler, you'd think he was a colt. Look at them ears!"

"Turn around, back, an' get set to pump that old gun, fella!" shouted Panatella. "Hell's a-goin' to pop. What'd I tell yuh?"

A crack, high above them, sounded in the air. A whistling whine passed overhead and ended in a spatter of sound. Panatella's whip-lash split the ear of the off-leader and the light vehicle tore madly down the road. It took a sharp curve on two wheels, and, at the exquisite driving of the tall bending figure, the horses straightened and galloped away at a desperate pace; the stage careening behind.

"That little hogback's my aim!" shouted Panatella. "An' if I makes that, bud, we got a right good chance."

The man back of him made no answer. But his rifle spoke. Once, twice, and the sound of the firing added fury to the maddened horses.

"They've honeycombed this hill like ants, fella," Panatella heard the man say, "an' if you knows how to use that silk, cut them babies up an' let's get somewhere."

They made the hill, and both men hit the ground at the same time and tore up toward the highest point of the ridge for a group of blue-flint outcrops. A horse squealed back of them and, as Panatella turned into a hiding-place, he saw a hopeless tangle of animals and harness centered around one beast, kicking furiously on the ground. Then he dropped to his stomach.

Bullets whined around them; bit into the hard flinty stone at their rear and sang the song of the ricochet as they went spinning into the air. Then a silence fell. Not a sound was heard. Panatella saw a small patch of red protrude around a boulder, to his right, and he fired instantly. A human form rolled from behind the rock.

"That's shootin'," said his companion. "Man, you must of sucked yore pap outa one of them things."

"I wonder cain't yuh stop that horse from squealin'? Kin yuh see it?" Panatella asked.

The rifle at his side spoke and the agonized cries of the wounded animal stopped.

"I got him. They don't move much when this old 45-90 busts 'em just so," he heard his companion say.

"I'm glad yuh salivated him," returned Panatella; "that kinda misery puts my teeth on edge."

Four forms leaped to a shelter and Panatella dropped one.

Then a peculiar thud sounded by his side and he turned in time to see the man who had accompanied him slumping down to the bottom of the covert.

"Un-huh," he mused, "got his nut up too high. I reckon that's teachin' me somethin."

PANATELLA settled down to a waiting game. The afternoon wore on. The rifle fire ceased. Once in a while he shouted aloud as though talking to some one inside his rough shelter. Frequently he heard a rock go crashing down the hillside, and from his position he estimated the Indians were endeavoring to get settled around him so that they could attempt a rush. He knew they were working closer, but he also realized that his ledge commanded the scene. He hoped for the darkness. A pang of hunger hit him and then an intolerable thirst. The buzzard had now been joined by many of his mates, and Panatella could not refrain from a smile as he saw their audacious maneuverings.

Far ahead, and exactly at the crest of the ridge above the blow-out formation, he suddenly caught sight of a naked Yaqui running down the side of the rim. The Indian crossed a little arroyo, hurried up a rise and disappeared. In an instant he reappeared, far out of range, riding a pony and leading twelve others; heads tied to tails in one long string. A thrill ran through Panatella. He knew that the Indian, a look-out, had caught sight of reinforcements. Cautiously he raised his hat above the rock, but no fusilade met its appearance. Then he chanced a backward glance, after raising a piece of flint-slab as a shield above his forehead, and saw a number of forms bowling headlong down the slope. In fifteen minutes the Indians had mounted and were riding away.

Then Panatella arose and, lifting the man below him, examined a deep hole just above the left eye. Gently he laid the form back on the rock and mopped his

forehead. Far in the distance he heard the clatter of running horses, and, looking out of the covert, saw the unmistakable figures of Mexican rangers. In their front rank a slight form bent low over the pommel of a saddle and rode like a cavalier.

It was Pablo.

Panatella dropped beside the dead man at his feet, drew out a partly filled sack from a hip pocket and stuffed it in the shirt of the corpse; then he jerked two sweat-stained aces of hearts from a pocket and jammed these into the band of the wide Stetson beside the dead man. This done, he jumped on the rocks above him and waved his own hat frantically at the approaching horsemen. They slowed down and altered their course.

Pablo was the first to reach the vicinity. A few of the *rurales* stared at the upturned stage, from which the horses had fled. The miserable beast the dead man had ridden was still tied to the stage.

"Who are you?" shouted a tall, swarthy Mexican as he approached the rocks.

"I'm the stage-driver," answered Panatella.

"Is that so?" asked the leader of the band of Pablo.

"*Si, Señor Capitan,* it is not your man."

"Did a man riding a silver-mounted saddle pass you?" asked the officer. "A man as large as you?"

"No, but he met up with me," answered Panatella. "Come up here and you will see."

As the soldiers dismounted and gathered about the dead man their leader stooped and picked a card from the upturned hat.

"You see, my brave fellows," he said with a gesture, "did I not tell you that this ride would be worth while. Ah!"

His eyes caught the edge of a canvas sack. He reached and drew out the bag of coin and jingled it in the air. Panatella caught the face of the hunchback and saw a deadly pallor spreading over it.

"Who is that man, Captain," he asked, still staring at the boy. "He fought the Yaquis well, for a while."

"He is the Ace of Hearts."

"You will give me some of the gold, won't you?" Panatella urged. "Did I not help in the capture? The Ace of Hearts! Why, you men will be rich."

A coarse laugh was his answer.

For some time the *rurales* lingered about the spot and then at a word gathered up the carbine, hat, a gold watch, and a few letters addressed to one Joshua K. Mosby. At a signal from their leader they moved toward the stage. Panatella asked permission to take the dead man's saddle, and this was granted him. He mounted the horse standing at the stage and, as the Mexicans rode away toward the little hamlet of Isabella, he dropped in at the rear and followed them.

The captain told him that he would receive the thanks of the stage-company manager when they got to their destination, and, if all were well, perhaps he would be given ten pesos for the brave drive he had made. At any event he would be allowed to keep the horse and saddle. That would take him to the border, for the Rio Grande was but twenty miles from Isabella.

Soon Pablo fell back and rode beside Panatella and after a moment, when they were quite alone, he raised his eyes to the sky.

"Have no fear, señor; no man shall ever know," he murmured. "The buzzards are already dropping to the rocks and there is still three hours of daylight.

Panatella glanced skyward.

"Tell the padre what you did for me, Pablo," he said. "Tell the padre that you saved me, and that I'll never steal again."

"*Ai!* And all my life I'll account it as my best deed. You are a good man."

"Don't say that, my boy; it makes me think of her." Then he added, "When the news of my death has been advertised on both sides of the border, I will see that you get a little gold. I cannot send much, but it will help. There will be a thousand pesos. I'll send them in a box of groceries."

"Señor! With a thousand pesos, I can herd my own goats. I'll buy candles to burn for her. Señor, I too, loved her. And when I meet her in paradise she will thank me for the work of this afternoon. Have no fear, a miracle has come to pass. She is around us, now. There, somewhere, in the sky."

A low moan escaped the lips of the older rider.

Up ahead the *rurales* were singing a mournful ballad. About the riders hung a shroud of dust.

TWO months later, Panatella, after making a pilgrimage to a sequestered spot on the Rio Grande, carried many strange bundles to a covered buckboard and threw them beneath a camp-outfit. Then he drove away

through the prickly-pear. Days and weeks went by.

Five hundred miles to the west, he ascended a little draw, went up its length and came out on a high mesa. Here he made camp. At breakfast, he saw a lone horseman riding slowly toward him. There was something familiar about that long, lean leg hung so carelessly over the front-roll of the saddle. Panatella placed his coffee on the ground and strained his sight at the approaching figure. Then he jumped to his feet and ran headlong to meet the down-necked pony.

"Alec!" he screamed. "Why, you damned old fool, ain't yuh daid yet?"

When he stood beside the horse an old face peered down into his eyes, and then a pair of arms reached out and a form toppled from the saddle. It was some moments before either man spoke.

"Drat my old sentimental soul," whimpered Alec, after a spell of gulps, "if I ain't glad to see you, Beeswax!

"Well, talk, man, talk!"

"I don't wanna talk. I wanna look. Damn if you ain't got gray in yore hair. Gray, an' yore eyes is sunk. How come that?"

"It's the sun, Alec. The sun an' the sand."

"What'll we do, now? I ain't never a-goin' to leave yuh," said Alec with finality.

"We'll go up west of Maricopa, just you an' me, an' we'll do a little ranchin'. Just run a few cows, an' live as happy as we can. Did yuh hear about my death? I figgered yuh'd know; an' Mellery."

"I got a clippin' in that cigarette-paper bed-roll o' mine back o' that saddle. I've pawed the damn thing to death. An'"—here Alec broke into peals of laughter—"the San Antonio *Express* said yuh had a fittin' finish. The buzzards et yuh clean. But how did they have yuh branded as Mosby?"

Then Panatella led him to the fire and told him everything. Everything, except of the girl. When they started on, Alec, in placing his blankets in the buckboard, felt the strange bundles under the packs of his friend.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Fifty thousand of the dirtiest dollars a man ever saw in one pile. I reckon them pieces of dinero will tide the two of us over till it's plumb pay-off time. It won't be so long, now. Don't seem anywhile since I was loopin' calves up at Fremont. Time ain't nothin', if you is interested. Did the Townley gal come out all right?"

"Yep. An' Mellery's got Denver money in the valley. It shore looks like a garden. That old place o' yores is where they built a dam. Just where you an' me figger'd. They don't give a dern for the weather now. Alfalfa."

"What?"

"Uh-huh, plenty grass, all times. But I ain't been back but three times."

"Where you been?"

"Driftin'. Mel, he figgered I'd bump into you if I kept a driftin'—but God, I'm tired. I knows every snake-hole from the Pecos to the Gunsight. An' I've learned a heap about some of this country."

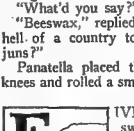
"If I'd 'a' knowed, maybe, but—giddap, damn yuh turtle-footed hat-racks, giddap." Then, after a period of silence, "I reckon that money back there ain't settin' well on yore conscience, Alec?"

But Alec made no answer. The team moved slowly over the tableland and when at last they were in the long aisles of the greasewood and mesquite Panatella fancied he heard the old lips at his side muttering. He turned his head.

"What'd you say?" he asked.

"Beeswax," replied Alec, "ain't this one hell of a country to steal from the Injuns?"

Panatella placed the lines between his knees and rolled a smoke.



FIVE years had gone swiftly by.

Sixty months of unremitting labor for Panatella, and during all this time he had toiled like one possessed of a devil. Toiled when his laborers were resting, worked when they worked, and put the very fear of God in them by the fierceness of his silence, the stolidity of his contact with them. He never smiled and he never played.

He made money. That seemed to be his aim.

Then one day he ordered a round-up.

The news, when carried into the bunk-house, created a vast comment. A round-up, between round-ups? Why, the cattle would be scattered from hell to breakfast and it would be disastrous besides. That's what they said, that's what they thought; but they got the wagon, the cavvy and the essentials ready and the round-up proceeded to a finish. Six thousand head

were cut out of a bunch of twelve thousand and these were driven to a feeding-ground, fed and shipped. They brought forty-four dollars a head.

The culls and runts were put back on the hills and Panatella cut down his hands from twenty to eight.

A week after things quieted down Alec put on a new suit of cream-colored corduroy and was driven to the railroad, where he took a train east. He carried a large amount of money, a list of names, and a huge letter of credit.

In two weeks he was back and the first thing he did, when Panatella and he were alone, was to hand the younger man a long slip of paper.

"On that you'll find just how I did it. Sometimes I sent it by mail, sometimes I got in a joint an' left it wrapped up with a name on it. But I made the grade an' paid it all back just as you said it had oughta be. Renrut's dead."

Panatella tore up the slip and dumped the fragments in a wood-box.

"Much obliged," was all the comment he made.

"Now," said Alec, "by Andrew Jackson, you kin smile. You don't owe nary a man a cent."

"Looka yere, Alec, sit down," shot Panatella. "I wanna talk with you." Alec flopped into a chair.

"You an' me, from now on, is like two forgotten graves," Panatella continued. "We ain't got to worry about nothin'; no future troubles, 'cause thay ain't no future. We're exact zero, the double O flat. Ten year ago I turned crook to out-crook a bigger crook. I shore made good. Five year ago I saw a light. I seen it clear as a September moonrise. Then I aimed to pay back all I done stole. I had a aim, then. You've took my money an' paid my bills. Now, thay ain't nothin' more to do but sit down an' wait. I had my chance an', well, I bogged down."

"Beeswax!"

"I cain't smile. I don't wanna be around people, an' if it weren't for you, I'd sell what cows I got left an' hit the grit for somewheres. I dunno where."

"Sell the damn cows! Hit the grit! Don't you worry 'bout me. Damn yore solo mind, anyhow. I made my pancakes afore I seen yuh, an' I kin wrangle my hash after you're gone to hell!"

Panatella smiled, then spoke deliberately.

"I've split what I had left, outa that beef sale, an' it's a right tidy sum," he said. "Up at Phoenix is the bank, an' here's a book for yore share."

Alec slapped the deposit book to the floor.

"I'm seventy-one," he said, "an' I never keered for a hoss, a cow, a dog, a woman, a kid, or a man, except something happened to 'em. I been with you, boy, since I was fifty. I've learned you backward, an' you've holed up in my heart like a bear all this time. An' now, what you doin'?"

Panatella centered a rigid gaze on the old face.

"I'll tell yuh, an' tell yuh pronto," Alec went on. "You've moved out. You went in there fat an' slick, an' you're comin' out lean an' hongry; an' you're leavin' what all bears leave—a stink."

Panatella continued to stare.

"It ain't right. It just ain't right, no ways," Alec complained.

"Why, Alec, you kin have it all. I don't want nothin' off'n you, old-timer. Why, I'd go to hell for yuh!"

"Shet yore trap! You'd do anything but what I want yuh to do. That's what you'd do. I wanna see some livin' in yuh; somethin' alive in yore eye except snake-fire. I wanna hear that old note in yore voice, that old pardner-talk on yore lips. Why, I bin with yuh, this last time, five year; an' I never had yuh try to cave in my back with a slap, an' I ain't felt yore fingers for ten year. I wanna see the old Panatella, I wanna see you eat something except yore own heart, I wanna hear somethin' except sighs, an' I wanna take a slant at yuh up in town, somewhere. Do yuh know yuh ain't been on a sidewalk since yuh come down yere? Do yuh know that?"

"Wait!"

The word was more like a wail than a command.

"I never knew I was still a-hurtin' anybody, Alec. I'll tell you what it is. Ever since I saw the rain come down that night I was beatin' it south with my relay string, I seen where fate done had the bulge on me; where destiny dealt me a bum hand an' laughed as I played it. I seen that, an' I got riled. Now I been a-settin' down yere an' thinkin' different thoughts. I think happiness is all dependent on what a man's got inside him—what he sees when he shuts his eyes, what he hears in a mockbird's song, what he lissens to when the wind's whisperin' in the pepper trees. I'm a thief; I knows I'm a thief. Nobody else knows it, but I knows it. An' that's

why I cain't smile. I cain't get shet of that air thing, nohow. Let's go outside."

"Beeswax!"

A wind soughed through the interval between the cook-house and the main cabin. The sound of its vagrant passing was like a moan. Each looked into the other's eyes.

Alec roused and spoke. "Would you rather be alone, with me?"

"Yes, for all time. We kin, batch. An' understand each other," Panatella answered.

"All right, we'll sell the cows, let all the boys go, an' chase the cook. Then we'll squat, an', by God, I'll learn you somethin' you ain't never heered of."

"You get shet of everything, Alec, an' take all the money for the cows. I'll get a bed-roll an' a pack-mule an' meander up in the hills for a month. Them big-horns oughta be fine huntin' right now."

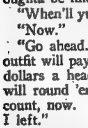
"When'll yuh start?"

"Now."

"Go ahead. The Y Cross Half Circle outfit will pay me better'n a run of twelve dollars a head for what we got left, an' will round 'em all up an' take 'em at our count, now. Told me they would, before I left."

"Take it, but hold out old Baldface an' keep a coupla milk cows."

Panatella moved from the room.



TWO months to the very day Panatella and Alec were sitting on the long earth-covered porch watching the lightning bugs sparkling in the hidden recesses of a heaven tree. The sun had vanished and a somber twilight covered the great basin.

Down at the gate of the road which led toward the west, a whinnying horse sounded. Alec arose.

"Wonder what hoss that is? Didn't yuh put 'em all in the south pasture?"

"Yep. That must be some water-sick scrub blew in from the Sahuaro patch."

Both men strolled toward the sound.

"Why," yelled Alec as they neared the gate, "it's an outfit! See that wagon an' the tarp?"

"Come on in!" shouted Panatella.

No answer.

"Mebbe you better stay yere, an' let me go ahead," murmured the old man. "Seems like if they was bent on bein' friendly they'd answer you. You stay yere, in case they's greasers."

Alec opened the gate.

"Anybody in there?" he asked loudly. "Cain't yuh talk?"

Then out from the cavern of the canvas there came a wailing cry. Panatella chilled. Alec moved forward at a bound and attempted to climb the wagon just as the team started to move; then he joined Panatella.

"What was it?" he asked.

"Sounded like a pup, didn't it?"

The old man jerked the team to a stop.

"Now," he said to Panatella, "climb up an' see what 'tis."

Panatella crawled over the seat and lighted a match. Instantly he reappeared.

"Old Trouble hisse'f has waltzed up yere on us all unbuttoned," he said.

"What?"

"Thay's a dead man in yere—an' a kid!"

"A kid?"

"A white kid; an' when I lit the match you should 'a' seen him look at me. He's dern near gone, Alec. What'll we do?"

"Fetch him out."

Panatella went back under the tarpaulin and in a second came forth with a bundle in his arm. Slowly he sat down on the foot-board, allowed his leg to find the hub, and stepped gingerly to the ground. The bundle gave forth a series of unmistakable cooing cries. Among the dirty rags was a slight heaving, or half-circular movement.

Panatella stared at his partner and Alec bent low in an attempt to penetrate the mystery of those soiled rags.

"Take it to the house an' give it a little cream, pure cream, mind yuh, an' fling in about two teaspoonfuls of bourbon," he directed.

Panatella continued to stare.

"Are you shore about the whisky? It don't seem like you feed 'em booze so young. I dunno, does you?"

"Well, get the cream in him, anyhow."

"How?"

"Take a pint bottle, stuff a rag in it, so's it'll flow easy an' let him suck it. If he don't take it nacherl, let him fly at yore finger an' drap the cream on the finger. It'll wo'k thataway. I've seen it. Now, I'll get this team out, an' slant a eye over the daid man. I wonder where he dropped his woman?"

Panatella hurried to the house.

When Alec came in he saw his partner rocking the baby, which was wrapped up in one of Panatella's silk shirts fast asleep. Panatella looked at the old man and the

old man stared at him. Then he sat down. His jaw dropped; his hands gripped the hickory side of his seat till the knuckles showed white. A mist came into his eyes, then he wet his upper lip with his tongue. Alec was looking at some sort of magic.

On the face of Panatella was a beaming smile. A dancing light shone out of his eyes.

"You know what the little son-of-a-gun did just before he went to sleep?" whispered Panatella.

Alec shook his head.

"Well, sir, after I an' him had plumb hell with the bottle he dropped back in the crook of my arm an' began to doze. He closed one eye at a time, like a hound-dog. Then he reached up with one of them little two-bit paws of his'n, an' so help me, he stuck it down my neck, heaved a sigh an' went to sleep. I never had nothin' hit me so plumb center as that. I just went cold."

Alec's toothless cheeks worked in and out and he jumped up and ran from the room.

When he returned Panatella was placing the baby on his bed, gently laying it on a pile of pillows three deep.

When the child was disposed of exactly to his liking, he placed a finger on his lips and motioned to Alec to follow him into a side room. Here he closed the door after the old man.

"By the etarnal," he chuckled, "now whatta you think of that little dude? Why, you know he's no scrub! He's thoroughbred. Why, Alec, he just reached up, a-totin' that little pink fist an' jammed them hummin'-bird fingers right down my neck. Lord, it felt good! It was a little thing, but it showed me somethin'."

"Un-huh." The old man's voice was scarcely raised above a whisper. "Life's just a bundle of little happenin's—an' big things. But if you don't do nothin' to disturb 'em they's both the same size, per-zactly. Feelin's, feelin's, I tells yuh, sonny, that's all thay is to life. An' if a little scoundrel like that kin give a man the Saint Vitus dance, why I think it's just the same sort of brain-pan whirligig as Grant got when he took Richmond, or Hayes got when they counted out Tilden. It's all the same. But lissen to me, you hear me? I'm older as you an' I knows I'm right. We gotta get a woman around this layout!"

Panatella raised a stricken face.

"Woman?" he said, "woman—*hell!*"

"We does. That little shote cain't be drinkin' his rations. He'll croak! Does you want to see him die like a blattin' goat? Gettin' peeked an' peeketer all the time?"

"God! Why, I couldn't stand that. But where's a woman who could n'see him?"

"Thay's a nester's woman near Maricopa, an' then thay's lots o' Pima squaws. I could slide out now an' be back by breakfast."

"What nester woman?"

"That one what lost them kids of smallpox. They was tellin' me of it when I climbed out of the train. Deal an' Dad Rainey was tellin' me about it."

"Smallpox milk for *my* kid?"

"Yores? Say, ain't we pardners?"

"Smallpox! Why, man, you don't know no more about babies than you does about snowshoes."

"Shucks! I'll take a chance on what she says. No woman's goin' to do dirt to a baby. Don't yuh know that? Babies an' wimmin, they is just as much linked up as square-face gin an' sin."

"Well, take a flutter with the team. An' Alec, hook up them blacks. They'll do that twenty mile to Maricopa in two hours an' thirty minutes, daid fancy."

"If they loafs thataway, I'll bet their ears will look like a map o' New Orleens."

There came a low cry from the inner room. Panatella opened the door.

"Get a woman, Alec, a woman or a squaw, but bear down on the hurry," he said with excitement. "I gotta be goin' back there. You wouldn't reckon a little top-hand like that would know enough to miss my holdin' him, would yuh?"

"What if some piece of calico comes along an' claims him?" suggested Alec.

"God!" exclaimed Panatella and hurried to the bed. The baby had rolled from the pillows.

DURING the next six years a great change came into the existence of Panatella. Men said he was the most likable man in the valley. He tok an active part in all county matters. His ranch becamê headquarters for all manner of men. He was sought after, looked up to, honored.

The little waif that had arrived beside the dead man was never traced; but four months after it had been rescued by the partners, a woman's skeleton had been discovered high up on a spur of hills. Sup-

position had it that she had wandered from camp gathering firewood, and had become lost in the thick chaparral. Her husband, evidently searching for her, had come across a spring and taking advantage of the water had removed his boots to bathe his feet. In this condition he had been struck by a snake.

The solution was entirely satisfactory to Panatella.

He had called the boy Mosby and never allowed any enterprise or circumstance to separate them.

One day in the early fall, as he sat on the porch watching the child spinning a rope in a clumsy fashion, Alec leaned over and said to him, "I wonder what old Mellery would say an' do if we trotted up there an' showed him how that dude kin ride?"

"I been thinkin' a lot about Mr. Mellery, these days," replied Panatella. "An' I knows now what he an' Colonel Townley thought of me. Does you reckon I'd be takin' much chance if I went in back there?"

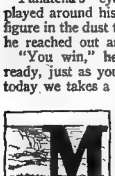
"No, Mellery says thay ain't a man in the valley as was there when yuh left, an' thay ain't a soul remembers nothin' 'bout them times when Renrut was stompin' hell outa everybody an' everythin'. Then——"

"Then what?'

"The husband of the Townley gal is now the sheriff of Grant County. Whatta you say? S'pose this Mosby was a-treatin' you like you is a-treatin' Mellery? Then what? S'pose he was neglectin'——"

Panatella's eyes narrowed; a smile played around his lips as he saw the little figure in the dust tangled in the loop. Then he reached out and clutched Alec's hand.

"You win," he said. "Get everything ready, just as you want, an' a week from today we takes a *poco pasear* back home."



MELLERY, Alec, Panatella, Mosby and the Townley girl, now the mother of a family of four, stood looking over a splendid vista of the Fremont Valley from the living-room of Banker Mellery's residence.

"It shore is great," commented Panatella, "an' it looks just like I seen it when I was a kid."

"Yes," replied Alec, "he was always a-tellin' me what'd happen when they stored flood-water up in them swales an' draws. He shore had the vision, Mell."

"Don't I know?" snapped the banker, his palsied hand rubbing Panatella's sleeve. "Don't I know, you derned old dry centipede? I found him under a Joshua-tree; I gave him his first pap; I watched him come up from a colt, an' I, why, I——"

He could say no more. His gaze drifted from the window and traveled to a corner of the fireplace. There Panatella saw a chopping-block with an old ax, buried to within an inch of the head, deep in the old log butt.

"Sonny," said Mellery to Mosby, "do you know who jammed that ax in there?"

"No, sir," replied the boy.

"Yore daddy."

"Beeswax!" cried the child. "That ain't nothin'. You had oughta see him build a loop around them desert cows. One horn, right or left fore-laig, any laig; over a greasewood bush. Shucks, he shore knows how to put the twine right there."

But that night when Panatella and Mosby had crawled into their bed, the child slipped an arm around the man's neck and buried his face in his shoulder. Small convulsions shook the slender frame; a sob struggled in the little throat.

"Why, old-timer," soothed Panatella, "what's gone wrong with the captain, now?"

"I seen you today," whimpered the boy. "I seen you slantin' a eye over them fields an' down them barb-wire fences at the alfalfa. I seen you. I don't wanna to stay here, Daddy; I wanna go back to the desert."

"Why, Mosby?"

"'Cause it's home, Daddy; just 'cause it's home!"

"You're a hard boss, son, but you shore is the boss. We'll ramble round yere, a few days, then we'll head back home."

Panatella felt soft fingers fondling his rough face.

A passenger-train, far in the distance, whistled for a crossing, and gradually the *burrh—burr—burrh—burr* of its passage faded away in the hills.

USED by us for sport, the original toboggan of the Algonquin Indians, from whom it was derived, name and all, was merely a drag made of the skin of a deer; indeed the name means "what is used for dragging." We adopted the word through the Canadian French, who used it in print as early as 1691.—F. W. H.

THE OLD SANTA FE TRAIL

IT IS impossible to estimate the importance of the part played by the old trails of the pioneers and traders in the development of the West, for they were the arteries of travel over which flowed the streams of explorers, trappers, traders, wagon trains and settlers, to spread out and populate the vast regions which are now our wealthy Western states.

We count it a privilege to use the columns of THE FRONTIER to help throw light on the fading lines of this great pioneer story; and we stand ready at all times to champion a greater respect for the old trails and their indomitable makers.

In a recent issue we published Wilbur Hall's fine story, "Blood of Pioneers," which gave a graphic portrayal of the grim California Trail. In an early number we shall have an editorial by old Ezra Meeker, who went over the Oregon Trail in its early days and has since devoted himself to preserving and marking it for posterity. In this number we are fortunate to have two fine presentations of the old Santa Fé Trail, in realistic fiction and in fact: Arthur D. Howden Smith's novel, "Trader's Luck," and Clarence E. Mulford's masterly article on the old trail itself.

"Trader's Luck," Mr. Smith says of his story, "is an attempt to portray one of the most dramatic and, strangely enough, little-known periods in our frontier history: the development of the Santa Fé Trail. Comparatively speaking, there has been very scanty treatment of this period in fiction, and, aside from several standard works on the plains, there is not a great deal of truly authentic historical material dealing with it. I was aided more than anything else by 'The Papers of James J. Webb, Santa Fé Merchant, 1844-1861,' printed recently in the Humanistic Series of the Washington University Studies, and edited by Professor Ralph Paul Bieber, who remarks of them, 'It is believed that the Webb Papers are the largest and most important single collection of manuscripts thus far located related to the commercial development of New Mexico,' during the period we are discussing. I also had the privilege of examining the manuscript of Mr. Webb's Journal, which contains much striking original material concerning incidents prior to and during the Mexican War and in the years immediately following. It is the best source I know of for the technique of the traders, methods of financing, character of goods, in short, the machinery with which they operated.

"Practically every incident in the story is an actual occurrence or founded on fact. Most of the characters are real; indeed, all of them except Weaver, de Rastignac, Jud Timmons and Cust. The incident of Kit Carson's visit to St. Louis hitches up with his trip there at this time for the purpose mentioned—that is, to leave his orphaned half-breed daughter."

And here is some good news for future numbers; we'll pass the stories on to you as soon as they leave Mr. Smith's pen.

"I propose to write a number of further stories dealing with Carson's life and career, as epical in its way as Daniel Boone's and constituting a rough cross-section of American frontier history. To me, at any rate, Carson and his Mountain Men friends are far more sympathetic than Fremont, with his continual egotism and

political ambition. I think, too, we owe Carson and the original trail-blazers the greater debt of obligation, despite the greater prominence history gives the man whose bubble-reputation burst in the white-heat of the Civil War."

DOING THEIR PART

ONE of the striking features of our experience in publishing THE FRONTIER has been the enthusiasm with which our writers have taken up the frontier theme. They feel, with us, that it is a privilege to tell a fine story and, at the same time, serve at least in a small way to paint the epochal canvas of our Western history.

"Seems to me that you are doing a lot more than publishing an interesting magazine in THE FRONTIER," says Elmer Brown Mason. "You are really recording history. The spirit of an age lives not so much in recorded facts—which repeat themselves in every age—but in the diction and habit of the day. And the spirit lives in THE FRONTIER. THE FRONTIER, to my mind, is unlike any other magazine —it's, well, *human*."

Mr. Brown has seen a good part of the world, and he is always a faithful depicter of the scenes he has visited. Of "Twisting Roots," his story in this number, he says:

"To those of us who have roved, and most of your contributors seem to belong to this brotherhood, it is manna to read of far places described exactly as our eyes have seen them. And THE FRONTIER is a vivid example of 'the nearer the truth, the better the tale.' I should be willing to wager a large percentage of the check that came to me for 'Twisting Roots' that several of your readers who have been in Borneo will recognize Li Fo—still more the Devil's Club. Li Fo—which isn't his real name, of course—long ago set out for his Buddhistic heaven with the knife of a river pirate between his ribs. I'm sure the Devil's Club still exists, however. As a matter of fact I last heard of it in the front line trenches before Ypres from an English subaltern."

THE AMERICAN INDIAN

ANOTHER fascinating page of American history which has been turned into the past and rapidly is being forgotten is that of the American Indian—the numerous tribes which inhabited the mountains, plains, forests and seaboard when the white man came. Steadily they were pushed westward and into oblivion, until now many of their tribal names are but memories. Few of us, indeed, know what became of the tribes which inhabited our own sections of the country. How many of us know the present whereabouts of the tribes which greeted the Pilgrims and Captain John Smith?

We have been fortunate in securing the services of some of the foremost Indian authorities for the preparation of a series of articles on "The American Indian" which will begin with "The New England Tribes," in our next issue. In these articles Mr. Alanson Skinner and his associates of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York City, will take the various tribes from their known origin down to the present day; the articles will be packed with surprising information—and thoroughly entertaining.

OKLAHOMA 25 YEARS AGO

THE Indian touch will be in the complete novel for our next issue, also; "The Last Domino," by J. E. Grinstead having its scene in the Oklahoma lands of the Chickasaw Indians. Although this is thoroughly a white man's story, the background furnished by the little state organization maintained by the Chickasaws is romantic and colorful and serves well to enrich an already excellent tale.

In the same number will be a long Colonial novelette by Ernest Haycox. "Red Knives" is laid in the Northwest Territory during the Revolutionary War and is impregnated with the savage war-whoop and fierce frontier conflict which raged around Detroit.

The other two novelettes for the coming issue have quite different settings: one, by J. D. Newsom, in the Moroccan desert; the other, by John Briggs, in distant Borneo—but they are both fine tales.

In fact, that next number is packed with excellent material we'd like space to tell you about—take that vivid article on fine old Bill Tilghman, written by William MacLeod Raine; or James B. Hendryx's editorial on "The Royal Canadian Mounted Police"—the old R. N. W. M. P.; or, again, Clem Yore's unusual frontier short story.

A WORD FROM YORE

WHENEVER one mentions Clem Yore, that old-timer steps up himself with an interesting talk, or one of his

many admirers jumps into the ring for him. There is solid fact behind his yarn, "Panatella's Redemption," in this issue; and his explanation of how he came to write it is almost as good as the tale itself.

"Somewhat explanatory of my yarn, 'Panatella's Redemption,'" he writes, "I want to say that I know a cowpuncher who bears such an appellation, and he is one bronc-fighting fool, too. The old banker of the story is living now and has just busted his bank by loaning cowmen money and seeing the market all shot. If those breeders could have held on till now, just four months, the bank would be solid, the cowmen happy.

"When the bank broke, a barber I know in that county seat lost seven thousand dollars. He was giving me a shave and I was sounding him out. I bore down on the banker a bit, (himself a first-class hand) when the barber said to me, rather cool-like, like a fella whetting a mowing-machine sickle, 'Hold on there, old-timer! Don't crowd an old man. He wrecked that bank; but he did it for the county's good and he'll come back. I lost seven thousand dollars, but if I had it today I'd wham it back into that bank just the same.' I then fell on his bosom and we talked and I learned from him some of the things I have placed in the opening of my tale.

"The stick-up of the bank I got from a dear old hand who lives at Auld, Colorado. He told me of a kid bank robber who always left a playing-card on every job he did, and it was invariably the ace of hearts. When the kid started rustling horses he didn't last long, and as the posse was getting ready to hoist him at the end of a lass-rope he said, 'This yere thing's most done, boys, eh?' The leader agreed with him. Whereupon the kid said he was the Ace of Hearts and when questioned about the playing-card told a graphic story of a love affair that was wrecked by a banker who put him in a reformatory back East for a technical banking crime. He lost his girl by the punishment and notoriety. 'Banks made a deuce of hearts out of me as a lover; so I turned bank stick-up and slipped each one of them an ace to show 'em I was getting better,' he said. Someone asked him how long it would take him to get out of that country if he was turned loose, and he told them if he wasn't somewhere else when God made the morning he would sure be hobbled or riding in circles. The posse freed him."

ABOUT TEXAS

DAN BEARD'S historical anecdote about the flag and glove the Kentuckians carried to Texas, which appeared in a recent Trading Post, has drawn some interesting letters. One from Sam Miller, of Mineral Wells, Texas, corroborates Mr. Beard and gives some interesting additional information about Texas flags. Says Mr. Miller:

I have before me, as I write, John Henry Brown's history of Texas, in which he states: "Volunteer companies from the United States brought flags, presentel by the ladies in their localities, which were thrown to the breeze wherever the foes of Texas were to be met; as Captain Sidney Sherman's flag from the ladies of Newport, Ky., and Cincinnati, Ohio, which floated at San Jacinto, and was afterward presented to Mrs. Sherman by General Rusk with well-earned praises of her husband and his brave company from Ohio and Kentucky." This no doubt is the flag referred to by Mr. Beard, as General Sherman was at the battle of San Jacinto where Mr. Beard's flag and glove were carried.

Speaking of Texas flags—when Captain Ward, afterward Lieutenant-Colonel, was passing from Macon, Georgia, to Texas, Miss Troutman (afterward Mrs. Pope) of Crawford County, Ga., presented his command with a lone star flag which was unfurled at Velasco and again at Goliad, over whose walls it gallantly floated until March 8, 1836, when news of the Texas Declaration of Independence was received. After a day of rejoicing and the firing of the sunset guns, an attempt was made to lower it, when its folds became entangled in the cordage and it was left for time to destroy shred by shred. This flag was constructed of white silk with an azure star of five points. On one side was the motto: "Victory or Death." On the reverse, in Latin, "Where Liberty Dwells, there is my Country."

The first Texas-made flag of record was made by Mrs. Sarah R. Dawson, of Harrisburg, in 1835 and presented to Captain Andrew Robertson and his company of volunteers. It was red, white and blue. The star was white, five-pointed, and set in a ground of red.

Over the cabin at Washington on the Brazos, where the convention met and issued the Declaration of Texas Independence, there floated a flag with the design of a sinewy hand grasping a red sword, and underneath this was a lone star flag. The flag that floated over the ill-fated Alamo was the Mexican tri-color with 1824 stamped upon it. It was the emblem of constitutional liberty in Mexico.

The official flag of the state today is red, white and blue; the star is white with five points, the fifth point at the top set in a perpendicular light blue background which is next the staff, and one-third the width of the flag. From this run the two stripes, the upper white, the lower red.

The seal of the state is also a five-pointed star surrounded with a wreath of laurel and oak. The Lone Star appearing on the front page of THE FRONTIER is representative of the Lone Star of Texas and is very attractive, especially to a Texan.

THE MAIL POUCH

AN OLD-TIMER who tramped the plains in the uniform of a private, finds THE FRONTIER to his liking—so much so that he passed the good word along to another of the old plains brotherhood:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

Just got the January number of THE FRONTIER. See my name in "The Trading Post" along with some others, but I claim to have been *there* more'n ten years before any of the others saw that country. The rest of 'em are all right though and saw enough to interest and keep 'em busy for a while.

'Long 'bout last September I picked up a copy of THE FRONTIER and first thing I struck was that poem by Ralph Barclay Barney, "The Old Frontiersman Speaks," and I sat right down and wrote to my friend Bill Hooker and told him if he wanted genuine Western stuff to get that magazine. He wrote back that he'd heard tell of it and would look it up. So I claim the credit of having put him on and he evidently likes it the way I do or he wouldn't have put my name in it with the rest of our old-timers.

A. B. Ostrander,
501 West 182nd St.,
New York City, N. Y.

Marshall R. Hall evidently gave the bell a good solid whang with his novel, "The Valley of Strife." We've had a good many like this:

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

"The Valley of Strife," by Marshall R. Hall, I am not afraid to say, is one of the best Western stories I have ever read. And let me say right now I've only been reading 'em for ten years. Mr. Hall sure can keep one spellbound.

Rusty Flynn,
New Jersey.

Equally popular was Albert Richard Wetjen's novel, "The Sea Gypsy." If you have not been giving us your opinions, start now; let us know how this number appeals to you.

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

I have just finished reading the fourth issue of THE FRONTIER and I can only say I'm sorry I missed the first three. It certainly is a wonderful magazine. "The Sea Gypsy," by Albert R. Wetjen, is one of the best stories I ever read, and I hope to see some of his work in THE FRONTIER again. One outstanding good point about this magazine is that all the stories are complete. I am sure the majority of people don't care for serials of any kind.

Best of luck.

William Gibson,
439 Fourth St.,
Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Any number in which a Clem Yore story appears is assured of its quota of enthusiastic readers. Here is one from a Texan admirer of "Micky Malone from San Antone":

Editor, THE FRONTIER,
Dear Sir:—

I have just finished reading the January FRONTIER and I'm here to say that if the rest of the magazines put out every month are half as good as this one—well, I guess I'll sure put out some money during 1925.

The more I read THE FRONTIER the better I like it. "Micky Malone from San Antone," by Clem Yore, was the best story I've read in a long, long time. I was honestly sorry when I came to the end.

The main thing that strikes me right about THE FRONTIER is that there are not any serials; all are complete stories. When I get interested in a good yarn, I hate like everything to see "next instalment in the next issue!"

THE FRONTIER sort of strikes us Texans because it gives us an "our magazine" feeling. You understand? The Lone Star on the cover and then the stories that deal with the state makes us have that "feeling." When you pick up a story and read about some place you really know, why it's doubly interesting.

Mrs. Hollis K. Parker,
New Braunfels, Texas.

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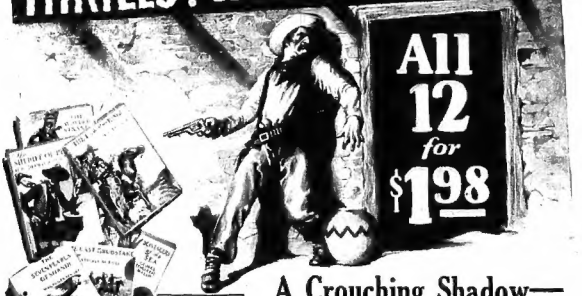
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MORMON VALLEY By H. Bedford-Jones. From New York to the blistering heart of the Painted Skull bad lands was some jump for John Marsh—but even the desert held less peril than the evil-eyed Dundas.

LAW OF THE RANGE by W. C. Tuttle. Sheepherder and cattlemen war to the death in old Nevada days. Tale of a ne'er-do-well who faced death with a grin.

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